

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



March 2019

Vol. 124, No. 3

₹ 15.00

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Mind Management in Work II*

That is the one cause of misery: we are attached, we are being caught. Therefore says the Gita: Work constantly; work, but be not attached; be not caught. Reserve unto yourself the power of detaching yourself from everything, however beloved, however much the soul might yearn for it, however great the pangs of misery you feel if you were going to leave it; still, reserve the power of leaving it whenever you want. The weak have no place here, in this life or in any other life. There may be a million microbes of misery, floating about us. Never mind! They dare not approach us, they have no power to get a hold on us, until the mind is weakened. This is the great fact: strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery; weakness is death. Attachment is the source of all our pleasures now. We are attached to our friends, to our relatives; we are attached to our intellectual and spiritual works; we are attached to external objects, so that we get pleasure from them. What, again, brings misery but this very attachment? We have to detach ourselves to earn joy. If only we had power to detach ourselves at will, there would not be any misery. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. The difficulty is that there must be



as much power of attachment as that of detachment. There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery, the wall never loves, is never hurt; but it is the wall, after all. Surely it is better to be attached and caught, than to be a wall. Therefore the man who never loves, who is hard and stony, escaping most of the miseries of life, escapes also its joys. We do not want that. That is weakness, that is death. That soul has not been awakened that never feels weakness, never feels misery. That is a callous state. We do not want that. At the same time, we not only want this mighty power of love, this mighty power of attachment, the power of throwing our whole soul upon a single object, losing ourselves and letting ourselves be annihilated, as it were, for other souls—which is the power of the gods—but we want to be higher even than the gods. The perfect man can put his whole soul upon that one point of love, yet he is unattached.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 2.3-4.



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EDITORIAL OFFICE  
Prabuddha Bharata  
Advaita Ashrama  
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat  
Dt Champawat · 262 524  
Uttarakhand, India  
Tel: 91 · 96909 98179  
prabuddhabharata@gmail.com  
pb@advaitaashrama.org

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Tel: 91 · 33 · 2289 0898  
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# **PRABUDDHA BHARATA**

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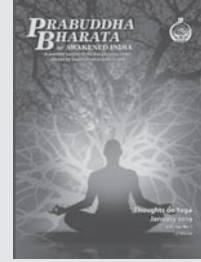
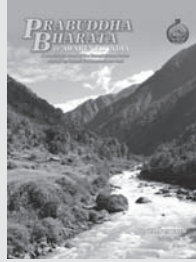


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*We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.*

*Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.*

*Swami Vivekananda*

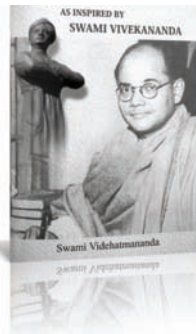
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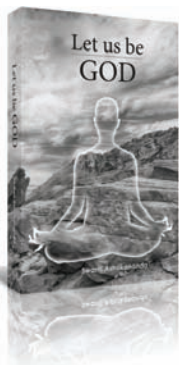
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The book's title was inspired by Swami Vivekananda's saying in his *Inspired Talks* and is as follows: 'The world for me, not I for the world. Good and evil are our slaves, not we theirs. It is the nature of the brute to remain where he is, not to progress. It is the nature of man to seek good and avoid evil. It is the nature of God to seek neither, but just to be eternally blissful. Let us be God!'

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Amrita M. Salm and Judy Howe Hayes



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After Swami Vivekananda addressed the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, he spent a couple of years in the United States and Europe sowing the seeds of Vedanta through illuminating talks. These talks have come down to us through J. J. Goodwin and Sarah Ellen Waldo. Waldo was the transcriber of the *Inspired Talks* of Swami Vivekananda, as well as the editor of most of his talks, including *Raja Yoga*. In addition, she has contributed numerous articles on Vedanta on the lines of Vivekananda. *The Inspired Life of Sarah Ellen Waldo* deals with Ellen Waldo's life and contributions to furthering the Vedanta movement in the West, inspired by her dedication to her Guru, Swami Vivekananda.



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**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

March 2019  
Vol. 124, No. 3

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शब्दब्रह्मणि निष्णातः परं ब्रह्माधिगच्छति ॥

॥ ६.२२ ॥

*Shravana angushtha yogena antar hridaya akasha shabdham akarnayanti sapta-vidheyam tasyo-  
pama yatha nadyah kinkini kansya-chakraka-bheka-vibkrindhika vrishtir-nivate vadatiti  
tam prithag-lakshanam-atitya pare'shabde'vyakte brahmanyastam gatas-tatra te'prithag-  
dharmino'prithag-vivekya yatha sampanna madhutvam nana-rasa ityevam hyaha.*

*Dve brahmani veditavye shabda-brahma parancha yat.*

*Shabda-brahmani nishnatah param brahma-adhigachchhati.*

(6.22)

By closing the ears with the thumbs they hear the sound of the space within the heart. There is the sevenfold comparison of it, like rivers, a bell, a brass vessel, a wheel, the croaking of frogs, rain, as when one speaks in a still place. Having passed beyond this variously characterised sound, they merge in the supreme, the non-sound, the unmanifest Brahman. There they are uncharacterised and indistinguishable like the various juices that have reached the state of honey. For it has been said: 'There are two Brahmanas to be known, the sound Brahman and that which is higher. Those who know the sound Brahman get to the higher Brahman.'

(6.22)

# THIS MONTH

**T**HE CONFLICTING ASPECTS of individual priorities and collective priorities are examined in **Self-Interest Vs Collective Interest**.

Farid al-Din Masud better known as Shaykh Farid or Baba Farid was a prominent saint of the Sufi Chishtiyya Order, founded by Abu Ishaq Shami in the small town of Chisht near Herat, Afghanistan. Dr Satish K Kapoor, a former British Council scholar and former registrar of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic University, Jalandhar, talks about this saint in **Shaykh Farid: Prophet of Divine Love**.

Meditation is a process of contemplation and internalisation. Bhaskar Jyoti Borah, research scholar at the faculty of music and arts, Delhi University, tries to understand the importance of meditation in the pursuit of Indian tradition in art in **Meditation and Its Importance in Indian Traditional Art Practice**.

In **The Epistemological Roots of Religious Tolerance in Swami Vivekananda**, Bharatwaj Iyer, an economist, blogger, and thinker from Mumbai, has a threefold aim: shedding light on Swami Vivekananda's concept of religious tolerance and acceptance, situating Swamiji's concept of a universal religion within his overall conceptual and philosophical system, and tracing the problems that this analysis gives rise to.

Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty, former head, department of philosophy, Presidency College, Kolkata, explains the **Methodology of Comparative Religion**.

In **Philosophy, Religion, and Peace—A**

**Pluralistic Approach**, Dilipkumar Mohanta, former first Vice Chancellor of the Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata, and former Vice Chancellor of Kalyani University, and a senior Professor of Philosophy at the University of Calcutta, gives a general overview of the issue from the point of view of a religious pluralist.

The young have wonderful insights on various issues. In *Young Eyes*, such insights are brought to the readers every month. This month we look at the plea of children to their parents and other adults for creating a happy and cheerful atmosphere around them in **Please Don't Be Sad**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Viveka**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

It is necessary to have the right attitude of sincerity and devotion before we undertake a pilgrimage. Only then would we be benefitted by the journey. This is explained in the story **Vyasa's Kashi Visit**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Martin Miesel, the Brander Matthews Professor of Dramatic Literature Emeritus at Columbia University, the author of *Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater* and *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts of the Nineteenth Century*, has written the book **Chaos Imagined: Literature, Art, Science**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.



# ***Self-Interest Vs Collective Interest***

**I**T IS COMMON NOWADAYS TO see people more concerned about their selfish interests than the interests of the organisation or community that they belong to. All this they do in desperate bids for self-preservation. Often it is the contention of team leaders that the team members do not put enough effort for the collective interest and are only interested in oiling their wheels. More often than not, this contention itself is raised because of the self-interest of the team leaders in trying to achieve laurels for themselves.

This problem has been debated and philosophised for centuries. The growing tendency to become increasingly narcissistic makes this more relevant today. Progress brought about by the human mind has only compounded the problem and confounded the confusion. Parameters and benchmarks of excellence have become increasingly individualistic. One can spend days, weeks, months, and even years without any face-to-face contact with any human being and yet feed on the toils of numerous humans, all the while enjoying such labours without any in-depth understanding of the actual condition of these fellow beings.

This isolation has resulted in self-interest being put ahead of the group interest. Such a shift leads to a decline of collective growth and sustenance, and the quality of collective welfare. For instance, if the members of a cricket team were to put their personal careers ahead of the goals of the team, it might be that the individual team member earns awards for one's individual performance, but could frequently jeopardise the growth of the team.

Psychologists study the common trait of

giving preference to the individual interest over common good and use the results of studies to better negotiate with individual members of a

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**Swami Vivekananda made real an idealistic model of preferring the collective.**

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group to align the group interests to their self-interests. There are interesting observations that come out of such studies. For instance, every member of a team draws from the collective or group the maximum one can and claims it a right for being a member of the group, but shies away from contributing to the group in the same manner. For example, an employee of a large multinational company would enjoy all the perquisites and freebies available to an employee as a right, but would have great difficulties in working without compulsion for an urgent crisis that the company is facing. So, the collective is emphasised when it concerns some self-interest, and the collective is relegated to a secondary place when it concerns self-interest. Essentially, it is the self-interest that takes predominance at all times.

Individual members of a team can be motivated to put the collective interests ahead of their self-interests if they can be shown with certainty that in the long-term, preserving the collective interests would automatically preserve the individual interests. It is imperative that the individual members of a group identify themselves closely with the group for the collective goals to be achieved. Also, some people are naturally inclined to put the interests of others or the group ahead



of their self-interests. Making them models worth emulation would help other group members to get inspiration to be less focussed on self-interests and more aligned to the collective interests.

The group or collective can also reward or reciprocate the actions of individual members of the group that are focussed on achieving collective goals. This would ensure that the individual member has an evident reason to be not prioritising self-interest. The gallantry awards given to members of the armed services could be a case in point. Similarly, the collective can punish the individual members if they do not focus on or align to the collective interest. However, all such methods of rewards and punishments to ensure the participation of the individual members of a group to achieve a collective goal have serious limitations. For instance, rewarding an individual member of a group uses the resources of the entire group and is definitely at a cost to the other members of the group, who are not rewarded. Punishments can further alienate members of a group, who were not focussed on the goals of the group and thus attracted the punishment in the first place.

The question of the conflict between self-interest and collective interest is also that of the conflict between liberty and civility, it is also about the conflict between fairness and welfare. It is also about the conflict between the 'is' and the 'ought'. The present-day market economy has as its foundation the overt emphasis on self-interest. If the common good is focussed upon, many of the products and services that human beings use today without compunction, could not be even thought of as a product or service. It is essential for the sustenance of the market that the consumers are not enlightened about the common good.

All questions of giving precedence to the collective good over self-interests also end up becoming questions of equitable distribution of resources. Also, it is a common trend of thinking

to make the collective in its own standing, as opposed to the collection of individual members, to be the only entity responsible for achieving collective goals. For example, we constantly blame the government for the provision and maintenance of public services like washrooms, roads, and transportation. However, we conveniently forget that such public services cannot be provided or maintained without the support and active participation by the members of the group, in this case citizens, in the form of paying of taxes and maintaining discipline while using these services.

The present conflict is also a major point of contention in matters involving ethics in the public sphere. In matters of national importance, this conflict often rears its ugly head and compels the structures created by the collective like the government to impose restrictions, prohibitions, and bans. However, an enlightened leader who is wise enough to understand that being an empathetic leader would only help her or his cause, would prove to be a leader, who always thinks of the collective, both as the common good and the good of the individual members of the collective.

Swami Vivekananda made real an idealistic model of preferring the collective. He did that mainly in the sphere of religion and spirituality. For him it was not sufficient that an individual spiritual aspirant gets the God experience, but he wanted that all beings be one with God. Swamiji found that the One and the many are the same and the microcosm and the macrocosm, the individual and the collective are identical. Only when all of us human beings strive for and acquire this knowledge of oneness can we be truly the same in both our self and collective interests. Till the complete realisation of this oneness and as a path to that final destination, we have to gradually uncover layer after layer of distinctions between the individual and the collective and treat them as one.



# Shaykh Farid: Prophet of Divine Love

Dr Satish K Kapoor

**F**ARID AL-DIN MASUD better known as Shaykh Farid or Baba Farid (1179–1266), with the popular title, Ganj-i-Shakar of Pak Pattan, was a prominent saint of the Sufi Chishtiyya Order, founded by Abu Ishaq Shami in the small town of Chisht near Herat, Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Abu traced his spiritual lineage to Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (1141–1236), who was eighth in line from the founder, carried the Sufi message from Sistan in present-day Iran to the Indian subcontinent by establishing his headquarters at Ajmer, late in twelfth century. He was succeeded by Khwajah Qutb-al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki of Delhi (1173–1235), whose worthy disciple, Sheikh Farid, sang and danced in rapturous strain of divine love and divine ecstasy, substantiating the unity, ubiquity, and eternity of god, to the point of pantheism. He adhered to the noble values of life, mixed with common people using Multani, the local dialect, and reinforced *sama* and *dhikr*, the spiritual practices of hearing and remembering god respectively, by music, singing, and dancing, or by chanting a divine name, to induce an ecstatic state.<sup>2</sup>

Born at Kothewal or Kahtwal near Multan, to Sheikh Jamal-ud-din Suleiman, a descendant of the second Muslim caliph, Umar, and Maryam Bibi, on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan, sometime between 1173–81 as per different historical versions, Farid had a religious



bent of mind since his childhood. He received education in the Islamic tradition at Multan, after which he spent about eighteen years visiting the Muslim holy places in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. After returning to India he settled at Hansi, an ancient town in Hissar district of Haryana, but shifted to Delhi after the demise of his murshid, Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, to take over the spiritual mantle. Due to political turmoil, he spent the latter part of his life at Ajodhan, now Pakpattan in Pakistan. Nizamuddin Aulia, the famous Sufi saint was among his disciples.<sup>3</sup>

Farid saw the divine everywhere and sought wisdom from nature, as is evident from his soulful verses that contain the images of trees, birds, rain, river-bank, soil, grass, and the like, to explain the unity of being, the impermanence of life, the futility of riches, the *raison d'être* of supplication, and the need of *ishq haqiqi*, real

love or love of the formless instead of *ishq majazi*, love at the gross level, to savour the melody of the spiritual regions within.

While the finite seeks the finite in human love, the finite glides towards the infinite in divine love.<sup>4</sup> Farid's love was transcendental as it stemmed from his propensity to know the real Self—the Self of all selves. As he grew up, love became an irresistible yearning to be pursued irresistibly, and he withdrew himself from everything else. Love enveloped his thought and actions, his speech and dreams, his behaviour and ideals. It became the chemistry of his blood and touched the marrow of his soul.

There was madness in his love—the madness of a mystic to quench his spiritual thirst by conquering the lower nature so as to rise up to the level of divinity itself. His love reminds one of George Santayana, who wrote: 'Everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development.'<sup>5</sup> To Farid, love appeared like a universal force that transcended time and mortality. It was not caused by elevated levels of testosterone in the body or erotic pulsations in the mind. It did not require some other for its expression, but found satisfaction in itself. Its end was not transient pleasure but spiritual fulfilment resulting in bliss.

If human love generates the sense of oneness at the physical level, divine love transforms consciousness, raising it to the divine level. Farid craved for the joy of identity, not through carnal satisfaction, but through mystical contact with god. His love animated all beings, and he became its very embodiment.

Love to him meant the desire and pursuit of the whole for witnessing beauty and glory of the Lord in fullness and splendour. He sought courtship with the cosmos but felt that the consecrated path was laden with difficulties. Yet he was determined to traverse it.

*Farida gali-e chikar dur ghar nal piare nebu, Chala ta bhijai kambli rahan ta tutai nebu;* Farid, the path is muddy and the house of my beloved is so far away. If I go out, my blanket will get soaked, but if I remain at home, my heart will be broken.

*Bhijao sijao kambli alah varsau mehu, Jae mila tina sajna tutao nahi nebu;* my blanket is soaked, drenched with the downpour of the Lord's rain. I am going out to meet my friend, so that my heart will not be broken.<sup>6</sup>

Farid regarded love as the only means of attaining divine knowledge. The human soul naturally aspires to experience the supreme Reality through direct, personal experience of god. 'The whole universe is moved by the same power of love towards the one Supreme Beauty, the most perfect, the most good.'<sup>7</sup> Farid's love grew to a unique splendour, with roots in earthly life and branches in heaven. His agonies for being away from God made him say: '*Farida chint khatola van dukh bireh vichhavan layf, ayhu hamara jivna tu sahib sache vekh;* Farid, anxiety is my bed, pain is my mattress, and the pain of separation is my blanket and quilt. Behold, this is my life, O my true Lord and Master.'<sup>8</sup>

The pain of separation affects mortals as it has spatio-temporal dimensions. Farid wrote: '*Birha birha akhi-ai birha tu sultan, Farida jit tan birahu na upjai so tan jan masan;* many talk of the pain and suffering of separation. O' pain, you are the ruler of all. Farid, that body, within which love of the Lord does not well up, look upon that body as a cremation ground' (1379; 36).

Once Farid hung himself upside down in a well, as part of a long penance. Addressing the crows, who were pecking at his emaciated body, he said: '*Kaga karang dhandholia sagla khaia mas, Ay duay naina mat chhuhao pir daykhan ki as;* the crows have searched my skeleton, and eaten all my flesh. But please do not touch these eyes, for I hope to see my Lord' (1382; 91).

Farid was immersed in God-consciousness all through his life. He spoke to God in his inner being and felt distressed when divinity did not respond. However, he would console himself by thinking that his call was not attended due to some mistake on his part: '*Tap tap luhi luhi hath marorao, baval hoi so saho lorao lohe hath marorau, Tai she man meh kia ros, mujh avgan sah nahi dos*; burning and burning, writhing in pain, I wring my hands, I have gone insane, seeking my husband Lord. O' my husband Lord, you are angry with me. The fault is with me and not with my husband Lord' (794; 10–11).

Farid compared the intense fervour of a spiritual seeker to the lovelorn *koel* bird who is said to have turned black after its wings were burnt in the fire of separation from her spouse. His passion for the divine, made him say: '*Farida rati rat na niklai jay tan chirai koay, Jo tan ratay rab sio tin tan rat na hoay*; Farid, not even a drop of blood would issue forth if someone cut my body. Those bodies which are imbued with the Lord, those bodies contain no blood' (1380; 51).

In line with Islamic mysticism, Farid considered the universe as God's temple, the heart of a person as the altar, and the spiritual seeker as the priest. Although he described God as the sole reality, devoid of attributes,

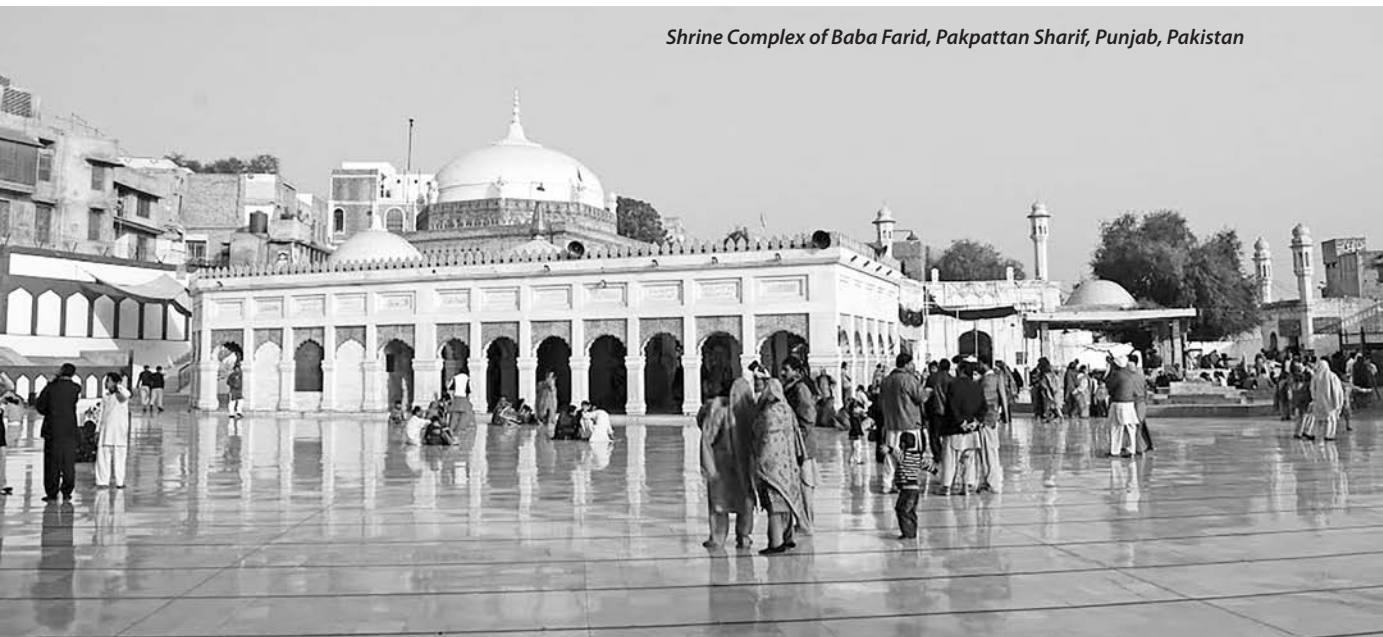
an energy that exists of itself, he held that one must prostrate in eternal submission to divinity with its attributes of supreme truth, beauty, perfection, and goodness: '*Jo sir sai na nivai so sir kijai kay, kunne hayth jalai-ai balan sandai thai*; That head which does not bow to the Lord, what is to be done with that head? Put it in the fireplace, instead of firewood' (1381; 72).

So ripe was Farid's faith in the divine that he regarded adversity as a blessing in disguise. He advised that one should not just rely on one's own strength in difficult times but seek God's help, 'for everyone else takes away but He gives'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, whatever God gives cannot be taken away by anyone else.

Farid stressed the importance of murshid, spiritual master, in life, and instructed that one should give in to the master like the corpse in the hand of corpse-bearers and comply with the will of God. Surrender, in its spiritual meaning, is not the triumph of the other, but of the higher self over the lower self. It is not self-deception or quietude, but freedom from the sense of 'I' and 'mine'.

For the elevation of the human soul, Farid unfolded the Sufi concepts of *tawakkul*, trust in God; *fana*, annihilation of individual consciousness; and *baqa*, everlasting subsistence in God. He chose the spiritual path of the

Shrine Complex of Baba Farid, Pakpattan Sharif, Punjab, Pakistan





ascetic that demands self-control, self-sacrifice, repentance, and renunciation, all of which promote inner harmony. He regarded wealth as the source of all mischief and lived a life of extreme poverty. He wore rags and accepted whatever offerings came to him voluntarily. Sometimes, he did not eat to save food for guests. He taught to be always content: '*Rukhi sukhi khai kai thandha pani pio, Farida dekh parai choprhi na tarsai jio*; eat dry bread and drink cold water. Farid, if you see someone else's buttered bread, do not envy that person for it.'<sup>10</sup>

Farid believed that dhikr or recitation of the name of God by observing a specific formula, could loosen the bonds of the lower self. Among the words of recitation could be, '*La ilaha il-lallah*; there is no god but Allah'. The Chishtiyya Order holds that the holy name becomes a living force if muttered loudly. It affects both the chanter and the environment around. Farid found the name of God, pleasant and luscious. He said: '*Farida sakar khand nivat gurb makhio manjha dudh, Sabhay vastu mithian rab na pujan tudh*; Farid: sugarcane, candy, sugar, molasses, honey, and buffalo's milk—all these things are sweet, but they are not equal to You' (1379; 27).

Prayer came naturally to him as breathing. He regarded it as the means to feel God's eternal presence. Apart from observing his obligatory ritual prayers at fixed times, he remained in a meditative state while doing daily chores. Since mystical experience is individual in nature, he wrote: '*Vat hamari khari udini khanni-ahu tikhi bahut pieeni, Us upar hai marag mera saykh Farida panth samhar savera*; the path upon which I must walk is very depressing. It is sharper than a two-edged sword, and very narrow. That is where my path lies. O' Shaykh Farid, think of that path early on' (794; 15–16).

Farid instructed that one's life should not be wasted in leisure and pleasure because sensate

gratification has no limit. He compared self-indulgence to the sweetness of sugar that becomes poison ultimately and makes life a tale of woe. To him, the world was like a well laid-out garden in which the human soul rested temporarily, to return ultimately to its original abode. Even the rich and the powerful lie all alone in their graves. Death comes suddenly and unannounced as in the case of the crane: '*Farida dari-avai kanhai bagula baitha kayl karay, kayl karayday hanjh no achintay baj pay, baj pay tis rab day Kaylan visrian, jo man chit na chaytay san so gali rab kian*; Farid, the crane perches on the river bank, playing joyfully. While it is playing, a hawk suddenly pounces on it. When the hawk of God attacks, playful sport is forgotten. God does what is not expected or even considered' (1383; 99).

The only way to escape from the clutches of death is to become one with the One while living. This is possible by observing moral purity, which entails seven principles, namely, repentance, patience, thankfulness, renunciation, poverty, trust in God, and contentment. Farid was an articulate advocate of nonviolence, the law of our being. Nonviolence is not cowardice but a great moral force that fosters love and fellow feeling. It is the absence of anger and malice towards others: '*Farida jo tai maran mukian tinha na maray ghummm, apnarhai ghar jaiai pair tinha day chumm*; Farid, do not turn around and strike those who strike you with their fists. Kiss their feet, and return to your own home' (1378; 7).


Farid professed that humility was a great virtue that must be cultivated for moral strength. He advised that one should become like grass that is cut or trampled under feet, but does not complain. To be unkind is to forget that the Lord abides in every heart: '*Sabhna man manik thahan mul machangva, jay tao piria di sik hiao-na thahay kahi da*; The minds of all are



like precious jewels; to harm them is not good at all. If you desire your Beloved, then do not break anyone's heart' (1384; 130).

Although Farid followed sharia, the Muslim code of law and *trīqat*, the discipline of Sufis, he respected all religions. He believed that the place where a saint resided became holy like the Kaaba. Natha yogis, Shaivas, Vedantists, and Qalandars, Sufi saints, among others, visited his khanqah, Sufi gathering place, to show him respect or to deliberate on metaphysical subjects.

Farid provided a mystical touch to the Punjabi literary tradition. Nearly eight hundred years after his advent, his compositions—four *shabds* and one hundred and twelve verses, as incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib, as also his verses in Persian and the Multani dialect—remain popular with the devout, even though some scholars have the apprehension that the hymns attributed to him were penned by his successors.

Farid's piety, sense of service, and liberal, religious outlook, set him apart from the orthodox saints of his time, and endeared him both to Hindus and Muslims, justifying the title of Ganj-i-Shakar, meaning a treasure of sweetness, bestowed on him by his mother. Universal love was his goal, and virtue, the way to it. He never bragged about himself, as those who are intoxicated by the love of God lose their identity in him. In utter humility, he wrote: '*Farida kalay maiday kaprhay kala maida vays, gunhi bharia mai phira lok kahai darvays*; Farid, my clothes are black and my outfit is black. I wander around full of sins and yet people call me a dervish, a holy man' (1381; 61). 

## Notes and References

1. The term 'Sufi' is derived from the woollen garments worn by the Sufis. The number of Sufi orders goes up to one hundred and seventy-five. Among them, the most important are: 1) Qaderiyya, developed from the school of Junaid and founded by Abdul Qader (1078–1166) of

Gilan, North Iran; 2) Naqshbandiyya, founded by Khaja Baha-ud-din Muhammad (d. 1388); 3) Shadhiliyya, founded by Abu Madyan (1126–1198) in 1197 and developed by Abu al-Hasan ash-Shadhili (1196–1258) of Tunis, North Africa; 4) Nematullahia, descended from Qaderiyya and Yafaiyya Orders; 5) Shattariyya, founded by Abdullah Shattar (d. 1472) in 1415; 6) Tijaniyya, a North African Order founded by Ahmad al-Tijani (1735–1815) of Algeria; 7) Sanussiyya, founded in 1837 by Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senussi (1787–1859); 8) Rifai'i, founded by Ahmad ibn 'Ali ar-Rifa'i (1118–81); 9) Mevlevi, founded by Jalal-ud-din Rumi (1207–73); and 10) Chishti, founded by Moinuddin Chishti (1141–1236). See A M A Shushtery, *Outlines of Islamic Culture: Historical and Cultural Aspects* (Bangalore: Bangalore, 1954), 359–61, 367.

2. For the history of Sufism in India, see Saiyad Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 vols (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986) and Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism and Society in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2010).
3. For a study of Farid's life, see Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-u'd-din Ganj-i-Shakar* (New Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i Delli, 1998); *Baba Sheikh Farid: Life and Teachings*, ed. G S Talib (Patiala: Baba Farid Memorial Society, 1973); Dr T R Shangari, *Sheikh Farid—The Great Sufi Mystic* (Beas: Radhasoami Satsang Beas, 2015); and Balwant Singh Anand, *Baba Farid* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1975).
4. For the biological, physiological, and psychological approaches to love, see, Will Durant, *The Pleasures of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 100–114.
5. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress: Introduction and Reason in Common Sense* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1906), 21.
6. *Guru Granth Sahib*, 1379; 24–5 <<http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?Action=Page&g=1&h=1&r=1&t=1&p=0&k=0&Paran=1379>> accessed 03 February 2019.
7. Abdul Qayyum, *Letters of Al-Ghazzali* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1992), 17.
8. *Guru Granth Sahib*, 1379; 35.
9. *A History of Sufism in India*, 1.146.
10. *Guru Granth Sahib*, 1379; 29.



## ***Meditation and Its Importance in Indian Traditional Art Practice***

**Bhaskar Jyoti Borah**

**M**EDITATION is a process of contemplation and internalisation—you look within; one can understand the mind through meditation. It has been practised since antiquity as a component of numerous religious traditions and beliefs to develop the spiritual understanding, awareness, psychological and direct experience of ultimate Reality. Traditionally, meditation was the main spiritual practice for self-realisation to touch the ultimate Reality and supreme Brahman. However, in modern times people approach

meditation for many different reasons, mostly for the peace of mind, relaxation, spirituality, and release from stress, increasing energy, healing power, and creativity. Thus, meditation has various possibilities to understand different aspects of mind.

If we try to understand meditation from the creative perspective, it can be easily defined as a creative process of revelation, because when our consciousness touches the inner awareness of the subconscious mind through meditation, then it becomes possible for our inner vision to project

aesthetic creativity. The present study tries to understand the importance of meditation in the pursuit of Indian tradition in art. It is already established by the ancient Indian texts on art and some other scholars that meditation has a great role in Indian traditional art practices, both philosophically and technically.

The pioneer Ananda Coomaraswamy says:

We find it clearly recognized that the formal element in art represents a purely mental activity, *citta-saṁā*. From this point of view, it will appear natural enough that India should have developed a highly specialized technique of vision. The maker of an icon, having by various means proper to the practice of Yoga eliminated the distracting influences of fugitive emotions and creature images, self-willing and self-thinking, proceeds to visualize the form of the *devatā*, angel or aspect of God, described in a given canonical prescription, *sādhana*, *mantram*, *dhyāna*.<sup>1</sup>

Indian tradition has a unique viewpoint on the experience of spirituality in art. Coomaraswamy specifies that Indian traditional art is spiritual and religion centric. Traditionally, in India, spirituality is practised in different ways. And meditation is one of the main disciplines of spiritual practices to touch the ultimate reality and self-consciousness. In this context, the yogi and the *śilpi*, the artist, or the *śilpi*-yogi creates some visual imageries or mental images—for instance, an ideal form of deity and symbolic or primal form of abstraction—to visualise that supreme Being and contemplate on it to get the spiritual experience.

The famous Indian scholar Surendranath Dasgupta mentions that ‘the form of the deity as realised in meditative intuition was verbally recorded as far as possible and it was the duty of the plastic artists to represent it in visual forms also. Thus the meditative intuition on the one hand translated itself into visual forms and on

the other, the visual representation on the basis of the mental intuition sought for to be realised by meditation by the novice who proceeded on the path of meditation.’<sup>2</sup> Madhu Khanna in her article on art and meditation, says that the

creative process of a work of art by a traditional icon-maker, for example, described so vividly in the writings of Coomaraswamy is a paradigm of a series of meditations, yogic visualizations and personal intuitions. The *śilpi* or artist usually begins his creative activity with sensory contemplation. Eventually this unbroken flow of concentration may result in a flash of aesthetic insight that makes the artist to the very heart of the object of visualization.<sup>3</sup>

So it can be clarified that meditation is not only a process in self-realisation and self-understanding but also a discipline of spiritual practices in art.

Let us now proceed to find the basic reason of Indian tradition in art, why its created images were religion-centric? And for what purpose were those images made? The traditional Indian view of art deals with the spirituality and aesthetic conception of *rasa*. It has been also clarified that in India, religion ‘gave a great impetus to the development of Art and sculpture.’<sup>4</sup> In this context the present study reveals that ancient Indian texts on *śilpa*, arts and crafts, have a unique contribution to Indian art, because these texts developed some specific principles and conventions in art practice, according to one’s belief and religious needs.

Thus, religion does matter for creative expression. The main purpose of making an image was worshipping rather than a creation of art for art’s sake. In India, art is not for art’s sake, art is for religion. Traditionally, the main purpose of art practised through creating the images and symbolic abstract representations were worshipping and devotion to gods, because

Indians followed traditions and believed in supreme Reality. Moreover, they were governed by many traditional rules and conventions.

The Hindu scriptures mention four goals of human life that are also called four *purusharthas*, namely, dharma, righteousness or duty; *artha*, wealth or prosperity; kama, desires; and moksha, liberation or salvation. The ancient Indian Purana text, *Vishnudharmottara Purana* holds that as the gods give human beings all these desired objects, therefore the gods are to be worshipped by human beings by all means. It was also believed that moksha is one of the main goals to approach the gods. So they thought that if they perform good works for gods then they would acquire merit for attaining liberation. These are sufficient reasons to induce people to worship the gods. To worship the gods one must have prepared their images. Thus, the necessity of the art of image-making arose in India.

### **Basic Philosophical Idea of Truth in Art**

From the aesthetic viewpoints of Indian art, beauty is the ideal, but not empirical beauty. This is the core indigenous quality of Indian art distinguishing it from the Western art of the beauty of the outside world. Indian art always sees Nature as a source of creating ideal beauty. So, the Indian tradition does not believe in the imitation of nature, it believes in the imitation of mental images. The tradition maintains that the aesthetic experience is akin to the experience of Brahman. The basic idea is that nature is impermanent; all the existence of nature is maya, illusion. In the tide of time everything changes. The mind cuts off from this world and then gradually goes away from empirical reality.

Thus, it was more important to idealise a beauty of an image rather than merely replicating its appearance. When we see the Ajanta and Bagh paintings and other traditional symbolic visual

imageries, there are no chiaroscuro, no Sfumato, and no volume, only the linear quality with flat colours define itself as what ideal beauty is. Because the inner vision of the yogi or the *shilpi* realises the ultimate truth through meditation. The *Shukra Niti* also mentions that ‘an image should be such as would infuse the spirit of meditation in the heart of the on-looker. Such an image is ideal from the Indian point of view’ (26).

Now, let us turn to the question of what is the basic philosophical idea of truth from the viewpoint of Indian tradition. Truth is what must be always permanent; truth is what is not changeable. The philosophical idea of truth is that Nature cannot have what we experience, because it is constantly undergoing change. Anything that changes and gets destroyed cannot be regarded as truth or reality.

The metaphysical idea of reality infuses the Indian artist to undertake meditation and discover through meditation what is given as truth. Truth cannot be reached by the search of empirical; it is only possible through meditation. The *Shukra Niti* says: ‘The characteristic of an image is its power of helping forward contemplation and *Yoga*. The human maker of images should, therefore, be meditative. Besides meditation there is no other way of knowing the character of an image—even direct observation (is of no use)’ (29–30). This is the basic idea behind meditation and that is why the Indian tradition believes in meditational practices to enable one to get at the truth and reality.

### **Dominance of Shilpa Shastras**

Indian *shilpa* shastras always give a better position to Indian traditional art with respect to the rest of the world, which grew up in the post Gupta period—sixth century to the eleven or twelfth century. Though the development of traditional art practice depended on the



development of *shilpa* shastras, but there still arose some doubt about the development of the texts themselves. Do they enrich or diminish the values of Indian art? On the other hand, the contribution of *shilpa* shastras to Indian art cannot be gainsaid. In these texts were developed some principles and conventions, which artists have to follow as their creative formulas. In this context, we can give examples of *shilpa* shastras dealing with the art of image-making:

- (1) Thus in *Brhatsamhitā* (chapter, 58) we get a discourse on *Pratimālakṣaṇa* dealing with images in general and some gods in particular.
- (2) In *Śukranīti* (chapter IV) we find measurements or images and allied topics dealt with.
- (3) In *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇam* (part III) we have description of some particular gods.
- (4) *Matsyapurāṇam* (chapter 259) gives the measurements of images in general as well as description of a few particular gods.

(5) In *Agnipurāṇam* (chapter 49) we have *Pratimā lakṣaṇam* spoken of (11).

Thus, with the development of these *shilpa* shastras emerged some spiritual records and stylistic forms in traditional art. It was like artistic vocabulary for an artist or image-maker to follow. Dasgupta says: 'Though the nature and character of these gods and goddesses were already indicated in the spiritual records, yet no artist could successfully represent externally, either in pictorial or plastic art, the ideal represented in scriptural record unless he himself entered into a meditative state in which he could realise visually by his inner eye the truth, the reality and the character of each deity.'<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the artist visualised deities through a symbolic form or geometric abstraction. In this context, Dasgupta says: 'The artist in giving expression to such a conception tried to express fully with the help of suggestive symbols the central character of the deity and the idea or ideas for which it stood' (32). That





is why sometimes it depends upon the artist's tradition as well as one's personal meditative experience to be successful in this art practice. Thus, traditionally, meditation was the main method and technique for this art practice.

### **Meditation in Relation to Art Practice**

We have already analysed that the Indian tradition has a unique viewpoint on spirituality. Traditionally, this spirituality is practised in different ways—mantra, yantra, tantra, yoga, dhyana, and so on. Art was also considered an important activity in this spiritual journey. Mantra and yantra have a special contribution to the experience of this spirituality. They are interrelated, because mantra is pure form of sound and yantra is a pure formulation of mantra or visual representation of sound. In this context, the *shilpi*-yogi created an ideal form of visual imagery. Either it was a figurative form of a deity or a symbolic form, for instance, a yantra, a symbolic form of a god or a goddess. This is a great contribution to Indian art essential to national idealism and national identity.

Traditionally, there is a perception and intention in this art practice to experience spirituality. The main purpose is to understand supreme Reality and realise one's own mystic nature; because it was traditionally believed that in this mysterious world beyond this physical reality there is a supreme Reality and supreme God in which we are all united. But when trying to understand this metaphysical truth and searching to find out the reality, many questions arise in the minds of the spiritual aspirants. In this journey they realise some philosophical truths in their intuitive vision through meditation.

In this context, the *shilpi*-yogi also plays an important role to visualise a mental imagery to understand this philosophical truth of Indian philosophy. After realising this through

meditation, they created the ideal form in terms of the supreme Reality. Thus, the ideal form is automatically involved in this art practice with some philosophical matters, like mystics and metaphysical doctrines, on the basis of Indian philosophy. The artists' pursuit of the Indian tradition in art, was according to their religious beliefs and practices of the time. Religion played an important role in their creativity, which is why it was said that the invention of Indian traditional art is not for art's sake but for the sake of religion.

The present study explores the two traditional types of intentions in art practice. Firstly, the creator or *shilpi*-yogi wanted to devote oneself to God so as to gain moksha from this physical world. It is a kind of human activity of life towards spirituality. The artist believed that through this spiritual activity one can touch the supreme Being like one's Atman becomes one with Brahman. With this personal intention, they created the ideal form through meditation. Secondly, when worshipping the ideal form that the artist has created for a wholehearted worship, the images induce in the devotee's mind a meditative and contemplative mood.

### **Artistic Approach**

When we try to understand traditional Indian art from a meditative perspective, we find that there are two stylistic approaches: figurative ideal forms of deities and a symbolic abstract form. Symbolic geometric forms like a yantra are suggestive forms of a deity. The artist tries to objectify a particular deity into a signified form of abstraction like a particular yantra through meditation. The artist always tried to maintain the harmony between dhyana and yoga aspects of an image. This balance is one of the important principles of Indian traditional art and is India's special contribution to the art world.

Bose says: ‘The Indian *Śilpācāryas* lay down that to make the images contemplative, it is necessary that the artist should also be of a contemplative mood, or it would not be *possible* for him to produce such images.’<sup>6</sup> In the works of this symbolic form of meditative art, linear and two-dimensional qualities dominate the whole image which is a most important feature in Indian painting. These are designed with some basic elements like *bindu*, dot, sparkling light, and geometric forms like triangle, square, rectangle, circle, and hexagon and a coiled snake, kundalini shakti. They juxtapose these visual elements with a particular form in a specific manner to represent the basic conception of tantric, yogic, mystic, and metaphysical introspections.

In this way, on the one hand, an artist tries to visually interpret the basic tantric ideas like the relationship between the microcosm of the physical world of human body and the macrocosm of the universe. On the other hand, they represent the union of opposite forces such as purusha, individual, and prakriti, nature, or as Shiva, male energy, and Shakti, female energy, with upward and downward triangle respectively. There are some other visual elements like Om, the primordial sound, and swastika and round lotus petal, that are highlighted in this art where the artist visually represents them in a certain direction so that one can easily turn the mind to a meditative mood. These are all clarified as meditative tools to discipline the mind. The application of colour is minimal. Most of the images had natural colours like primary and secondary colours such as red, blue, yellow, green, black, and white in relation to beliefs about nature and religion.

From this study, we can conclude that meditation has a great role in traditional Indian art practice. This is a pure ideal form of art and national idealism that talks about the mental images, not about the external



images and forms. This mental image can be visualised only by looking inside the mind, where meditation captures the pure form in the realm of aesthetic creativity. PB

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# ***The Epistemological Roots of Religious Tolerance in Swami Vivekananda***

**Bharatwaj Iyer**

**T**HIS ESSAY HAS a threefold aim. In view of its main aim of shedding light on Swami Vivekananda's concept of religious tolerance and acceptance, it shall begin by seeing if this complex phenomenon called religion can be defined. In his 'Paper on Hinduism', which he delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions, he explicitly declares his project of reconciling the various divergences and contradictions that religions display vis-à-vis each other with this string of questions: 'Where then, the question arises, where is the common centre to which all these widely diverging radii converge? Where is the common basis upon which all these seemingly hopeless contradictions rest? And this is the question I shall attempt to answer.'<sup>1</sup> In this first section we take up the task of trying to locate these various radii that are found commonly in all religions; the radii which undergo differentiations and variations.

The second task will be to try and situate Swamiji's concept of a universal religion or the universal acceptance of all religious dispensations within his overall conceptual and philosophical system. In the concluding section of the essay, the few problems and difficulties that this analysis gives rise to shall be presented as food for further and more extensive research.

## ***Once Again, What is Religion?***

As the practised religions of the world scale the entire length of the globe and span a timeline

from the dawn of human consciousness to the present age of technology, bio-engineering, and artificial intelligence, one's definition of religion and religious experience must also necessarily be broad. From the indigenous tribes of Amazon to the shamans of Siberia to the Scientologists and Mormons of the United States to, finally, the so-called axial religions that boast the largest distribution of followers in the world, the term religion encompasses too wide and various a panoply to very easily fit any single definition.

If the offered definition were that religion is that which binds man to God, then Jainism and Buddhism stand to defy the claim by denying any religiously necessary place to God and any bond whatsoever between God and human being, while at the same time functioning, now for more than two millennia, as religions. Even if God's existence were admitted in the other religions, the description, understanding, and manner of approaching God is so divergent in them that to use the word in common for these distinct experiences is itself problematic. What is meant by God in Islam is, for instance, so different from what it means to a devotee of the Nagaraja temple at Mannarasala in Kerala, that an unqualified use of the same term in the two instances seems out of place even on the surface. And yet we need some description to locate the idea somewhere in our conceptual system.

One way of defining the phenomenon is to say that religion refers to a system of beliefs

and practices aiming to i) take the human being beyond one's individualised and atomised ego, to whatever extent, and ii) to conceive of reality as something more than *what* is presented to us and *how* it is presented. Another element that needs to be appended to these two is that iii) religious experiences seem to be phenomenological in their reception. They are held to be self-evidential, for they feel so real in their appearance and impact that we are at a loss to find sharper and more immediate conceptual tools to analyse them. This would be my set of key concepts, to which an auxiliary fourth component would presently be added, by which every religious impulse could be mapped.

Although differently framed, every description of religion must include these first three component concepts. Indeed the taking of the self beyond itself is so universally flavoured with religious overtones that to the psychologist Carl G Jung (1875–1961) even an alcoholic in seeking to rid oneself temporarily of one's mental or physical misery is, to that extent, seeking a religious or spiritual crutch.<sup>2</sup> And even in the most materialist and immediate conception of the world there is bound to be some idea, like that of universal momentariness or universal selflessness in Buddhism, of things really not being how they appear to us. It is this that gives religions the semblance of being secret societies with secret messages.

The Mexican Indian peyote user or the ayahuasca-consuming Urarina shaman from Peru would look at the inquisitive and innocent anthropologist or ethnobotanist with the highest pity for not being privy to the hidden psychedelic secrets of these plant compounds. Indeed, the earliest expressions of religion, because of being connected to magic and the manipulation of nature, took the form of mystery societies.

Thus is added to our description the fourth

element: secrecy. And the secret involved here is not just one that helps manipulate nature to our benefits, but in the more developed stages, it evolves into the secret and unique possession of an ethical code which maintains balance in society. Indeed, in the proselytising religions of the world that are now dominant, this prehistoric impulse of sharing in a common secret and initiating new members to share in it, is unmistakeably present. The four elements discussed above can stand as fair candidates to be the different radii that diverge but are formally found in all that can be called religion.

### ***The Possibilities of Religious Toleration***

Now I would like to situate Swamiji's concept of universal religion within his overall work and thought. To know a lump of clay is to know all lumps of clay, he constantly maintains. To know the foundation of something is to know that which unites all its later variations. In his 'Paper on Hinduism' he said:

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. Thus Chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfil its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion becomes perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world. One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no farther. This is the goal of all science.<sup>3</sup>

The present-day physicists working towards the unified theory that could account both for



the laws of gravitation and thermodynamics; the psychoanalysts seeking to find the base for both the death drive, Thanatos, and the sex drive, Eros, in the later Freud; and the evolutionary biologists seeking the single gene from which the whole complex history of life can be traced will all agree with Swamiji's observation from a century and quarter ago.

What is to be noted here is not only the fact that the goal of every science, including religion, is that of finding that common centre and foundation of which all the other phenomena are but manifestations—in the case of religion, variations on the four elements we saw—but that the variety of manifestations aren't hindrances or deviations from the truth but are in fact instruments and tools by which the truth is to be reached. It is 'through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached', Swamiji says (*ibid.*). And this is the only way by which the toleration and acceptance of religious diversity can be attained—by acknowledgement of the diversity as so many paths taken by persons 'wending their way to the same goal', and as so many different opportunities to approaching the same subject matter.

Indeed, not only are they tools towards the attainment of unity, but they are the epistemic foundations to even understanding the value and reality of universal toleration as a positive phenomenon. Without differences the need for tolerance and unity doesn't arise at all. That is a point of tautology. However, that is so only if toleration and acceptance are seen as negative phenomena, as merely existing to stop dissension and conflict. Understood in that negative sense they are unnecessary. If these differences of outlook were levelled, there would remain no *raison d'être* for acceptance and understanding.

However, universal acceptance and toleration of the 'other', understood as positive

manifestations of love, are necessary in their own right, making the multiplicity and duality of different religious paths equally necessary. Without the latter, to even know what loving universal acceptance of the 'other' means would be wholly impossible. The 'other' and its irresolvable differences are what makes it possible to know what love and acceptance could mean. These differences are hence both epistemological and practical requirements of the spiritual path. It is primarily through the finding and knowing of the differences, more than the commonalities, that Swamiji's approach to universal religion is to be understood.

Swamiji also holds that this diversity is not only good but also unavoidable. The lump of clay called epistemology teaches this as well, regarding the lump of clay called religion. In his lecture entitled 'Introduction to Jnana Yoga' Swamiji says,

How are perceptions made? The wall opposite sends an impression to me, but I do not see the wall until my mind reacts, that is to say, the mind cannot know the wall by mere sight. The reaction that enables the mind to get a perception of the wall is an intellectual process. In this way the whole universe is seen through our eyes plus mind (or perceptive faculty); it is necessarily coloured by our own individual tendencies. The real wall, or the real universe, is outside the mind, and is unknown and unknowable. Call this universe X, and our statement is that the seen universe is X plus mind.

What is true of the external must also apply to the internal world. Mind also wants to know itself, but this Self can only be known through the medium of the mind and is, like the wall, unknown. This self we may call Y, and the statement would then be, Y plus mind is the inner self. Kant was the first to arrive at this analysis of mind, but it was long ago stated in the Vedas. We have thus, as it were, mind standing between X and Y and reacting on both (6.43).



This same epistemological analysis applies to religion. In its highest mystical state, the X that refers to the Absolute is a silent, individual experience. But as soon as it is communicated it becomes X plus speech. And by speech here is meant not just language. However, speech, unlike the unknowable and absolute X, is a knowable and mutable phenomenon, making religious expression necessarily diverse and even contradictory due to the various ways and methods of spiritual knowing. This however is no cause for dissension and conflict. To fight over what is necessary and inevitable is irrational. 'Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me,' Swamiji says, beautifully translating the Bhagavadgita (1.4).

We have here used epistemology in two different senses, giving us two different approaches. It might be useful to structure them to the extent possible. In the latter sense, we use it negatively. The epistemological impossibility of attaining the true and final knowledge of external reality, as it is in itself, helps us understand the need for divergent and non-final approaches to spiritual reality as no system of words and concepts could attain this final knowledge. In the former sense it is used positively. The existence of difference as exhibited by the 'other', serves the epistemological function of making love, religious tolerance, and universal acceptance a real possibility.

### **Problems for Rumination**

Having somewhat analysed the reason and possibility for a universal acceptance of religions, a few problems which the analysis gives rise to can now be posed. The first difficulty is the association of religious tolerance exclusively with interfaith tolerance. That, however, is limiting

in scope. Universal toleration of religion is to mean not just Christianity tolerating Islam or vice versa, or Buddhism tolerating Hinduism or Hinduism tolerating Islam, and so on. Though they matter, interfaith questions are not the only ones to be raised in discussions of religious acceptance and toleration.

For what about the acceptance of religion in politics, economics, sociology, law, and civics, and so on? Religion is always isolated and insulated from these and the question of the toleration of religion in these domains is never raised or tackled. Is it possible to tolerate religion in the public sphere in a real sense? If spirituality, its theory and praxis, were to be an adequate solution to the real problems of the world and of the human being as its inhabitant, as Swamiji believed, the question of its inclusion, acceptance, and toleration in the public and not only in the private space is a very pertinent one. Even if one's answer were to be that religion and spirituality belong only to the private life of an individual and that between God and Caesar there always ought to intervene an adamant wall—even so, the raising of the question, the discussion of the issue in connection with the subject of toleration is of crucial importance.

Just as different religions offer different paths towards the same solution, and just as these paths have a positive value in generating a sense of community, understanding, and love, so too do the religious and the secular worldviews represent different approaches to the fundamental problems of the human species on this planet. And the insulation and isolation of religion from these due to the lack of toleration shown to its meddling and interfering in matters, supposedly, not concerning it, leaves the world that much poorer of the same multiplicity and duality and their epistemological value that we

saw when arguing about interfaith religious acceptance and tolerance.

In his *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* Karl Marx considers religion to be an opium of the people. 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people', he says to quote him fully.<sup>4</sup>

Marx is here not talking about the irrational or superstitious in religion, but of something that even the highest expressions of spirituality have a tendency towards: isolation and insulation from the hard realities of politics and economics due to which the religious are numbed to a sleep and open for exploitation in these various spheres of life. The sigh that religion helps a person utter is not to Marx a delusion but a real cry of anguish. However, the difficulty lies only in that religion instead of offering real solutions to the problems helps anesthetise a person's sense of oppression.

Lenin would later comment thus on this most famous of Marxian ideas: 'Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.'<sup>5</sup> These critics of religion cannot be marginalised by those on a religious or spiritual path, but must be met with squarely, fairly, and honestly. How should the meaning of tolerance be broadened to include tolerating religion coming out of its isolation and no longer functioning merely as an opium or analgesic?

Should the spiritual traditions develop their own critiques of political economy, their own interpretation of law and social relations, and so on? Or should they accept the prevailing economic model that presupposes the very exploitation of human being and nature that

spirituality is trying to extricate the human being from? Should, as some hold, religion and spirituality not be tolerated at all in the public sphere and remain merely a private matter? But what if religion and spirituality alone, in their understanding of the sacredness of nature, have an adequate solution to the ecological crisis, to take one example? How does one bridge these profound gaps? Thinking over these problems reveals that they are not as easy as they appear. Toleration and universal acceptance of religion beyond the realm of the interfaith is no easy matter. How in all this can Swamiji's practical Vedanta be situated and made use of? This concluding question can best bring the essay to a close. ❧

## Notes and References

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2. To William G Wilson (1896-1971), one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, Carl G Jung wrote in a letter dated 30 January 1961 about an alcoholic patient of his, Roland H: 'His craving for alcohol was the equivalent on a low level of spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God. ... You see, alcohol in Latin is *spiritus* and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: *spiritus contra spiritum*' (*C G Jung Letters*, ed Gerhard Adler, 2 vols (East Sussex: Routledge, 1990), 624-5).
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# Methodology of Comparative Religion

Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty

IN THE BEGINNING of the twenty-first century, when human beings are bewildered and puzzled by the phenomenal progress of technology on the one hand and complete breakdown of values on the other, naturally one turns to religion for an answer and perhaps a solution. Scientists, who once discarded religion as a kind of superstition, are gradually being drawn to recognise religious truths and values. Not that they are straightaway believing in a God or gods, but they are admitting the existence of religious facts which have their own meaning. Most of the social philosophers of our times have recognised the profoundly influential nature of religion.

Prof. Arnold J Toynbee suggests that while the movement of civilisation is cyclical, the movement of religion is continuous from one civilisation to another.<sup>1</sup> Today logical-analysts have given up much of their vaunted dogmatism. There is no longer one single language-game. Wittgenstein suggests that the business of analysis is to discover the various rules of different language-games.<sup>2</sup> And religion has its own language-game. But the person behind the language is more important than the language itself. Analysis of religious language must be correlated with an analysis of the existence of the person who speaks the language. Logical analysts and existentialists have to make a co-operative endeavour to unravel the proper meaning of religious assertions.

Religion has got a large spectrum, having a multitude of facets under it. Broadly speaking, there is philosophy, psychology, and sociology

of religions. Also there is a comparative study of religions, which is highly fruitful and which may, in one sense, be taken as basic to the study of other facets. What is essential is a correct handling of multifarious religious facts and a proper ordering of them. Unless this task is done, all talks of philosophy, psychology, and sociology of religions become futile.

## What is Comparative Religion?

Comparative religion is a subject of recent origin. Only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the attention and interest of scholars was drawn to this new but fascinating branch of study. Around 1867 the eminent German scholar, Max Müller, used an expression, *religionswissenschaft*, by which he meant a scientific study of various religions of humankind. He wanted to distinguish the scientific study of religion from philosophy of religion on the one hand and theology on the other.

Philosophy of religion is primarily concerned with the rational aspect of religion and does little justice to subjectivity. Again, theology is occupied with the main task of advancing rational justifications for religious behaviours of a particular religion. Max Müller endeavoured to bring out the unity of religions scientifically—philologically and historically. But as he progressed with his method, he too could not avoid the overall supremacy of reason.

There was a time when 'religious norms' were explained historically and sociologically. Anthropologists took great interest in primitive



Prof. Arnold J Toynbee (1889–1975)

religions and made valuable contributions to the problem of the origins of religions. But a distinction should be drawn between these two subjects. History of religions should be content with the description of historic and pre-historic religions. In other words, it should be only a descriptive study. But comparative religion is both descriptive and non-descriptive. It is an autonomous discipline though it leans on such auxiliary studies as history, phenomenology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy.

In so far as it is dependent on phenomenology and philosophy, comparative religion assumes a non-descriptive character. In the course of time the real nature of this discipline was brought out by such eminent scholars as Friedrich von Hügel, Max Scheler, Nathan Süderblom, Joachim Wach, Rudolf Otto, and others. They wanted to maintain an integrated outlook

and dive deeper into the nature of religious experience. They laid powerful stress on the objective character of the ultimate Reality and on maintaining a balance between rational and non-rational elements of religion.

### ***False Notions of Comparative Religion***

Before we enter into the question of the methodology of comparative religion, it would be wise on our part to remove some false notions about the discipline. First, it is held in certain quarters that comparative religion's only business is to find out similarities and dissimilarities amongst religions. But this is not true. The proper objective of comparative religion is to find the unity of humankind in a universal religiosity.

Beginning from the cave-dwellers down to the moderns of the present century, a unity of primordial religious experience runs through the entire history of humankind. Schleiermacher spoke of divination as a universal faculty of the human being. 'Faculty of *divination*', as Otto describes it, is 'the faculty ... of *genuinely* cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearances'.<sup>3</sup> By calling it universal one should not mean that it is actually present in any single individual. It is a general capacity of mind and as such it is to be counted as a universal potentiality of the human being. When a person encounters a higher reality, one has an experience which transcends mere empirical facts. This transcending 'overplus' builds one's religious experience. It is the duty of the comparative religionist to determine the nature of the 'overplus'.

The second false notion lies in the opinion that comparative religion evaluates different religions and places them in a hierarchy. Comparative religion may be interested in religious values but valuation is not its job.



It does not condemn any religion as low, nor does it prize any religion as high. All religions, primitive or modern, dead or living, are equally important to it. There was a time when a number of Western scholars studied the religions of humankind from the standpoint of Christianity. They assumed that Christianity was the best form of religion. But this is undoubtedly a biased attitude and a comparative religionist must free oneself from it.

Yet, there is a third false notion. Some suppose that the aim of a comparative religionist is to formulate either a synthetic or an eclectic religion. A synthesis is something different from the sum total. A synthesis of religions may be built on the materials supplied by different religions but the synthesis will be something startlingly new. But a comparative religionist has no such aim. One might be an analyser of religions but not a founder of a new religion. Nor does one promise to create an eclectic religion by weaving the best merits of each religion. The problem of merits or demerits does not perturb such a person at all. This person does not erect norms to evaluate the faiths of mankind but has the goal of discovering the essences that lie hidden in the particulars of religion.

Any discipline must follow some definite method and comparative religion is no exception. Naturally, the question crops up: what should be the proper method of this infant discipline? Max Müller applies the historical method to the investigation of the facts of scientific religion. He believes that every religion has developed in the course of history and there have been historical contacts between different religions. He declares that it is his chief object

to show that there is a constant action and reaction in the growth of religious ideas, and that the first action by which the Divine was

separated from and placed almost beyond the reach of the human mind, was followed by a reaction which tried to reunite the two. This process, though visible in many religions, more particularly in that of the Vedanta, was most pronounced in Judaism in its transition to Christianity. Nowhere had the invisible God been further removed from the visible world than in the ancient Jewish religion, and nowhere have the two been so closely drawn together again and made one as by that fundamental doctrine of Christianity, the divine sonship of man. ... this reaction was produced or at least accelerated by the historical contact between Semitic and Aryan thought.<sup>4</sup>

Max Müller does not think that a theoretical study of scientific religion is in any way fruitful. He does not rule out the possibility of such a study but he cautions us to test the theoretical principles by the process of history. He says that a strategist in one's academic study may know all the rules of war but a successful general knows how the rules have stood the test of history. The general knows what actual battles have been fought and how they have been fought and how they have been won or lost. The true science of war is the history of war.

Similarly, the true science of religion is the history of religion. The historical method is particularly helpful in the study of religions of nations who belong to the same family of language, Semitic or Aryan or Polynesian. When we compare the Greek or Roman religion with Vedic religion or Zoroastrianism, we have to recognise the underlying community of the Aryan language. In the case of India and Persia there is not merely the community of language but also a historical community between the ancestors of Indians and Persians. Max Müller attaches great importance to linguistics while applying the historical method to the study of religions. In order to know the religious ideas of Greeks,

Romans, Hindus, and Parsees, 'the deep-lying linguistic substratum' (65) is to be unearthed.

Again, there are sufficient words in Sanskrit and Greek, which show that the common ancestors of Hindus and Greeks had a religion and culture of their own. The Greek word *zeus* and the Vedic word *dyaus* illustrate the point. So far as Hindus and Persians are concerned, a linguistic survey is even more helpful in determining the mutual indebtedness to Vedicism and Zoroastrianism.

While enunciating the historical method, Max Müller stresses the historical contacts between different religions. According to him, the Jews came in contact with the Zoroastrians in course of history and borrowed from them the beliefs in the resurrection of the body, in the immortality of soul, and in future rewards and punishments. The Zoroastrians again borrowed from the Jews the belief in the oneness of God (47–8). Of course, these assertions of Max Müller about borrowing beliefs may be challenged by critics and Max Müller himself says that they cannot be convincingly proved. After all, no religion can grow in seclusion. At various points of history, we come across fruitful contacts of such diverse religions as Aryan, Semitic, and Mongolian.

But the historical method adopted by Max Müller is not without its defects. To study different religions with the help of linguistics may be helpful when the religions belong to the same linguistic group. Greek, Roman, Vedic, and Zoroastrian religions may be studied together. Similar approaches may be adopted with Mongolian and Austric religions from their respective linguistic bases.

However, in comparative religion, where our scope covers all religions, both dead and living, the linguistic approach will be of little value because we fail to discover a common

stock of significant words shared by all nations. Secondly, the historical method may describe processes and developments but it gives us little or no knowledge about the ends. A correct methodology should cover both processes and ends. Thirdly, the historical method does violence to psychological speculation. Why should one try to explain the various religions of the Aryans by their common origin? They may very well be explained not by their common origin but by their common humanity.

In comparative religion, we have to use the 'historical method' for collecting data, but it is not enough. It is to be supplemented by the phenomenological method. I would like to say that the proper method of comparative religion should be historico-phenomenological. History points to the outer traits, while phenomenology indicates the core-ends of religions. It is true, religion is ultimately of the nature of relation between God and human being; but the history of religion focusses on the human side, which is most accessible to us. But this is not enough. For the inner ends of religions, we have to turn to the phenomenological method.

Now, to speak of the application of the phenomenological method to the study of comparative religion, we must first enunciate the main features of the method. Phenomenologists differ from one another, sometimes widely. The doctrine of the 'intentional structure' of consciousness is interpreted differently by Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Then there are idealistic, realistic, and neutralistic phenomenologists. But, so far as method is concerned, all phenomenologists agree more or less. Broadly speaking, we may rely on one phenomenological method, if not on one phenomenology. The three important features of the method are as Herbert

Spiegelberg would call them 'investigating particular phenomena; ... investigating general essences; ... apprehending essential relationships among essences'.<sup>5</sup>

To investigate pure phenomena is not an easy job. One has to eliminate factual constructs and dive deeper into one's subjectivity. By a kind of a priori insight one has to free oneself from all preconceptions. Care must be taken not to understand 'a-priori' in the usual sense. Phenomenologist's 'a-priori' starts from the facts of experience and intuitive processes are involved in the 'a-priori'. The aim of a phenomenologist is not to reduce all phenomena to a few basic ones as logical atomists would do. She or he has to strike a balance between two extremes, total rejection and total affirmation of phenomena. Now, all phenomena are not given by sense-organs. There may be phenomena which are feeling-oriented and will-oriented.

The second feature of the phenomenological method lies in investigating general essences. In phenomenological terminology, it is 'eidetic intuiting'. Husserl wanted to touch the universals that lie behind particulars and he attributed 'ideal reality' to them. Universals or essences, according to him, are irreducible ideal entities, but not real entities in the Platonic sense. The third feature is apprehending essential relationships. Essential relationship may be the relationship within a single essence or between several essences. By using the phenomenological insight, it is possible to discover the essential relations of essences.

In order to arrive at the pure facts of religions as demanded by phenomenology, one has to understand correctly the various religious texts of mankind. Here comes the problem of hermeneutics. What is hermeneutics? It is the scholar's attempt to explore clearly the principles that are needed to understand religious texts. If

somebody asserts that such texts embody the word of God and are therefore infallible, the historical setting is denied and hermeneutics becomes useless. Again, if one declares that whatever is given in one's religious texts is true, be it scientific or not, all talks of hermeneutics becomes gibberish.

In other words, should we take the whole of the Bible or the Koran as the voice of God? In that case such events as creation, virgin birth, miracles, and resurrection are to be accepted as truths. But are we, the moderns of the twenty-first century, prepared to accept them as truths on a par with scientific truth? This is the problem and an easy solution is to classify people into the categories, namely, believers and non-believers. Belief and reason have somehow to be related to each other. Then, there is the question of limits of belief. Can we believe in absurdities and logical inconsistencies on the ground that they are given in religious texts? The answer is no. But these materials form an important dimension of religion and to deny them is to deny religion itself.

So, the problem remains. When we scan a particular religious text, we come across two aspects that are distinguishable but not separable from each other. The first is the historical setting and no hermeneutics can deny it. A religious text must be due to a person. It is generally believed that the Vedas were not created by humans. In order to understand the true significance of this assertion, we should not take it literally. The Vedas were certainly created by persons but by such persons as were divinely inspired. The Vedic sages including women had undergone the disciplines of *satya*, truth; *rita*, moral order; and *tapas*, spiritual ardour, before they undertook the task of composing the hymns. Rig Veda says: 'The first and foremost speech that the sages uttered, giving the unnamed a name, a speech that was their

best and most stainless by means of which they revealed with love the divine secret lying hidden in their souls.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, to satisfy the essential condition of hermeneutics, the Koran must not be taken as uncreated. According to Islam, the Koran was given by a person, who was divinely inspired. Prophet Mohammed, a God-intoxicated man, is the author of Koran. Orthodox Muslim schools would of course say that angel Gabriel dictated the Koran in toto to the prophet and only the prophet recited the holy texts. But for the purpose of hermeneutics we have to accept the position of the Mutazilites, in Islam, political or religious neutralists.

The true meaning of revelation has to be analysed here. Revelation is the unveiling of a hidden mystery that is inaccessible to human reason. But this does not mean that revelation is antirational. The divine truth is perhaps suprarational. Revelation is always the confrontation of God and human being through historical events. The important thing in revelation is not 'truth concerning God but the living God Himself'.<sup>7</sup> God inspires prophets who feel the presence of God in historical events. Prophets in their turn express in language the divine meaning that permeates all events. Each religious literature has its own historical setting. Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Lord Buddha, Mahavira, Zoroaster, Laotze, and Confucius had their historical characters.

But Hinduism as a religion cannot point to any founder. Hindu religious literature is historical in the sense that Vedas and other scriptures are the results of divine-human encounter in course of history. The Hindu Puranas speak of religious truths in the context of historical settings. But the main aim of the author of a Purana is to propagate religious and moral maxims through the events of history.

This is why these authors often mix up history with mythology, legends, and exaggerated stories to glorify divine deeds. But today frontiers of knowledge have been extended to a great extent. To use the expression of Martin Buber: 'He must treat religious text as a "thou" and not as an "it"'.<sup>8</sup> In the proper 'I-thou' attitude the learner establishes a personal relationship with the text. The learner will ask questions and the text will answer. Again, the text will evoke questions and the learner will answer. I believe, the best purpose of hermeneutics will be served only when the enquirer and the text are in a state of rapport with each other.

Thus we see that a correct use of general hermeneutics helps us to discover the phenomena of different religions. From the level of pure phenomena, the comparative religionist dives deeper to reach the universals or essences. These various religious universals are all united in an intimate relationship with one single essence which is the being of God. Their participation is not manufactured but *given* as Gerard van der Leeuw would view it. People do not become members of religion but belong to it.

Space will not permit to describe fully the nature of religious universals. So let me refer only to some paradigm cases. The first and the foremost religious universal is unity. It is the unity of humankind in religious experience. One may differ from another in thousand and one ways, but there are also areas of agreement and cooperation. Religious experience is one such area.

Religious experience is a response to an ultimate Reality that conditions all finite realities. It is not merely the physical, vital, or mental response. It is the total integral response that constitutes the fundamental stuff of one's




religious experience. According to Prof. Clement Charles Julian Webb: 'The religion of every religious man belongs to him not merely as a participator in an activity shared with others, but as being the individual person that he is. It belongs to him, indeed, not only as the person that he is but as being *all that he is*; with his bodily senses, his emotions, his interests, his social contacts, his affections, as well as with his understanding.'<sup>9</sup> The response may be taken as the engagement of the total person in one's encounter with the ultimate Reality.

Numen is another religious universal. Otto carried on extensive research in the field of comparative religion and discovered it. Numen is a non-ethical objective Reality outside the individual self. When we use the word 'holy' or 'God', we attach moral significance to it. But these words have a clear 'overplus' of meaning. This 'overplus' is what Numen signifies. One may bluntly call it the non-ethical and non-rational core of Divinity. The feeling of Numen is the pristine religious feeling. Otto says: 'This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined.'<sup>10</sup>

Again, this feeling cannot be taught but it can be awakened in individual minds. Numen is the mysteriously dreadful. When one apprehends it, one has the feeling of something uncanny. This feeling of the weird forms the basis of all religious consciousness, beginning from savages down to the moderns of the present century. The Numen has a Dionysiac element involved in it. It is not merely dreadful but also fascinating. It is an object which is at once fearful and charming. Its mystery excites horror and dread in the religious person, but at the same time allures and entrances her or him.

## Conclusion

To my mind, it is *trust* and *trust alone*, which infuses a meaning into a person's religious experience. It is also the keynote of one's total involvement in religion. Since one is not a detached spectator of the religious drama, one needs a firm mooring, a secure foundation trust offers her or him, the sense of confidence and security she or he needs. There is no room for doubt or vacillation in a truly religious experience. A total involvement in religious pursuits is not possible in an atmosphere of doubt. Religious justification emanates not from a human being but from God. It is the eternal mystery of God which generates a new dimension of trust, which can be described as 'sanctification'. The religious individual enters a new life and lives it with one's total being. This is the eternal message of religion for the individual—past, present, and future. 

## References

1. See Arnold J Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (New York: Oxford University, 1948), 235–6.
2. See G L Pandit, *Methodological Variance: Essays in Epistemological Ontology and the Methodology of Science* (Berlin: Springer Science and Business Media, 2012), 134.
3. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1958), 144.
4. F Max Müller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ix.
5. See Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1994), 682.
6. Rig Veda, 10.71.1.
7. William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1949), 322.
8. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2004).
9. C C J Webb, *Religious Experience* (London: Oxford University, 1945), 39.
10. *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

# ***Philosophy, Religion, and Peace —A Pluralistic Approach***

**Dilipkumar Mohanta**

IT IS SOMETIMES CLAIMED that everything that is relevant for our time is contained in the Indian tradition. And there are also thinkers who consider it irrelevant for us today. Political leaders are taking mileage from both these groups as their vote banks in India today. It is important to examine both the claims. Today, we are to avoid the extreme positions adopted by some orthodox thinkers, like Shashadhara Tarkachudamani, who tried to justify the religious customs of the Hindus with the help of pseudo-scientific explanations and claimed that all the recent discoveries and inventions in science were known to the Hindus since the Vedic age. We have also to avoid thinkers much enamoured of Western civilisation in general and the Marxists in particular, often making many sweeping statements without cogent evidence.

Without entering into this unproductive controversy, I would rather delve on the attitude that we need today to deal with the Vedic-Upanishadic philosophical heritage. I would also try to address the issue of peace in relation to religion. It is indeed true that one of the major issues of the philosophy of religion today is centred round religion and peace. There are three important considerations for religion contributing for peace—reason, morality, and spirituality. I would rather give a general overview of the issue from the point of view of a religious pluralist. What I am going to do here is a second order activity about the issue.

As I understand, the true spirit of philosophy lies in worshipping freethinking and openness. In the Indian way of philosophising in the form of critical reflection on the past as well as the contemporary developments in humanistic and scientific endeavours, we can inherit the past as well as claim freedom from the past. No doubt, there are important aspects of ancient Indian thought that flourished through the Vedas and the Upanishads. But it is undeniable that the greatest bondage is the slavery of thought, and therefore, for our betterment we are to enjoy the freedom in ideas. Critical examination must precede any acceptance or rejection. We propose to welcome freethinking and openness, because these are important for the development of human science, philosophy, and culture. In other words, we can free ourselves from our total and blind obedience to scriptures or shastras.<sup>1</sup>

The merit of such philosophical attitude is expected to liberate human beings from one-sided dominance of 'the old creeds and dogmas'. In a speech delivered outside India on 18 November 1896, what Swami Vivekananda, like Buddha, said is quite relevant today. According to him, religion is to be judged in the touchstone of logic and this would eliminate the superstitions connected with religion. 'Sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. ... All that is dross will be taken off,

no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation.<sup>2</sup>

The second consideration is morality. Here it is virtue oriented. It is the gateway to religion. After morality, comes the consideration of spirituality. It is the basis of social value. It purifies the moral dimensions of action. Purity is the essence of spiritual value. It is called pure, because it is done with no expectations; rather it is done out of a sense of sacrifice for others, as a sense of duty to others. The so-called 'other' is essentially 'I'. It refers to our very existence and through it ordinary morality is being transcended.

Morality pertains to progress while spirituality pertains to perfection. A holistic account of life cannot ignore the comprehensive hierarchy of values. Morality is necessary for entering into the realm of spirituality just as the aerodrome is necessary for an aeroplane in order to take off, but the act of flying by the aeroplane can take place only transcending the aerodrome. So morality and spirituality are interconnected, the former is necessary for the latter, and the latter can only be reached transcending the former. But how are these related in a meaningful way? Even if we urge someone to be moral in the very ordinary sense, the question arises: why should one be so? It is an ontological question. Without any ontological foundation neither morality nor spirituality can be explained. The ontology of 'oneness' is involved here. This is, as I understand, one of the fundamental aspects of the Vedic-Upanishadic philosophy.

If we go through the scriptures of the major world religions, we see that in every scripture there is praise for peace. We see it in Islam that the words 'let there be peace upon you' are a form of salutation. There are many shanti-mantras in the Vedic literature. Now we see there are many academic departments devoted to peace studies. It is indeed true that peace is being disturbed and

the misuse of religion, especially by politics and its media, is one of such causes that disturb peace. Inequitable distribution of wealth and immoral ways of life contribute to conflict. We may discuss about peace, but we cannot mechanically bring peace. From the cosmic point of view, all human beings are integrally related. The essence of humanity lies in 'Oneness'. Here, one totally extends oneself to others. Seeing others in suffering, one feels suffering and beyond this, at others' happiness one feels happy. This state is the state of empathy. Reason, morality, and spirituality are three necessary marks for true religion.

Now let us see religion in the context of conflict. It is a fact that humanity has been facing the devastating problem arising due to communal riots and killing of human beings and destruction of human civilisation due to the political misuse of institutional religion. Though postmodernism is the practical manifestation of globalisation, it is burdened with its failure to drive the human race to a more developed and peaceful world, despite the availability of better technology at our disposal.<sup>3</sup> Religious fundamentalists are growing stronger. The fundamentalists, who are using religion, do not believe in values like equality, tolerance, or diversity. On the contrary, they seek to organise social life on the strength of religious dogmas. The fundamentalists misuse politics and institutional religion as a means of capturing power.

When politics overshadows or dominates true spirituality in the domain of religion, we see a reign of terror everywhere. Neither the fundamentalists nor the power mongering political institutions believe in true spirit of democracy, which is based on values like freedom and open-mindedness. True democratic culture rests on 'debate, discussion, and dissent'. Today, incited by the politicians and media, the increasing manifestation of violence, very often in the name of religion has exceeded all limits. This

is really one of the greatest dangers for mankind. Nevertheless, counter-violence cannot abolish violence. War is opposed to all three virtues of human being—spirituality, freedom, and culture.

It is to be noted here that the great Emperor Ashoka's (third century BCE) Rock Edict 12 contains this declaration: 'One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour others' religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too.'<sup>4</sup> It is undeniable that religious tolerance and acceptance of 'others' as an alternative in principle is another necessary condition for peace today.

We are encouraged to learn today the language in which we should *speak with* others instead of *speaking about* others. The same moral spirit must be there when we live in a multi-religious society. And this should come from our genuine interest in the involvement, engagement, and participation, with others along with our admission of the fact of difference with others. One-sided imposition of majority values upon minority or appeasement may lead to an identity-crisis and creates an atmosphere of one-dimensional identity in the form of orthodoxy. It begets violence.<sup>5</sup>

The consequence of 'power philosophy', whether in the sphere of religion or politics, is obviously violence, conflicts, and absence of peace. So the spiritual values like love, empathy, and cooperation are important for human unity today and to get rid of the evil forces we propose to transcend various commonly known world views in the context of religion and culture.<sup>6</sup> This attitude strengthens the application of the principle of live and let live. It would initiate, may be slowly, a common spiritual journey on a deep spiritual level of our being-hood. We cannot deny the importance of inquisitiveness, catholicity of mind, and the implicit conviction that 'truth'

has ulterior expressions in the form of alternative discourses. Both formal and informal systems of public education should have scope for knowing other cultures and religions. We should work for the collective good and give up the belief that our faith is more genuine and true than that of other. 'My God is better than your God' is as childish as 'my dog is better than your dog'.

We are to see that religion teaches love and not hatred. The media has a great and positive role to play today. We are to listen to philosophers who ask us to critically examine before accepting anything.<sup>7</sup> Critical reasoning helps us to reconcile the conflicting views of religion and also helps us to get rid of superstitions in the guise of religion and of the danger of communalism, bigotry, and many other bloody happenings in the name of religion. The idea of removing all differences, making all people alike is neither compatible with human nature nor conducive to human progress. Today, we should neither try to club people of different cultures or religions with diverse sets of values under the same homogeneity nor should we ignore their potential contribution to the common good.

The Bengali poet Chandidas (1339–99) says: '*Sabar upare manush satya tabar upare nai*; there is no greater truth than humanity.'<sup>8</sup> The god Brahma in the form of swan says in the Shanti Parva of Mahabharata: '*Guhyam brahma tad idam vo bravimi, na manushat shreshthataram hi kinchit*; I tell you that this Brahman is indeed hidden, there is nothing greater than the human being.'<sup>9</sup> In a society based on humanistic values of cooperation and distributive justice, knowledge must be constantly updated, enriched, and modernised. Human beings are to recreate the past with a sense of 'distancing nearness'<sup>10</sup> and avoiding orthodoxy. The latter allows no change and modification. The dignity of human life is to be upheld as an end and not as a means. Therefore, the future of humanity cannot lie in returning to the past as it



is impossible to reverse the flow of time. Rather, it lies with moving ahead, like a flowing river with various tributaries, by connecting the freshness of the present materialistic achievements and the gift of science with ancient moral and spiritual values. Understanding of the past by only the orthodox way is deadly for the human race.

This model of understanding does not regard the existence of other religions as a hindrance to worldly progress and peace, and is guided by a practical plan which does not allow for questioning the encountering of religion. In the light of this pluralistic understanding of the phenomenon of religion the 'I-Other' relationship should be reshaped not as mutually exclusive but as complementary in macro-level and essentially identical in micro-level. The 'other' is not opposite to me, but as good as me. In this sense when I speak of the 'other' I speak 'with' the other and not 'about' the other in the macro-level discourse.

To paraphrase Swami Vivekananda, we can have a spiritual journey from the lower self to the higher self by serving others. In the former case there is an inherent concept of tolerance, but in the latter it is the fact of acceptance.<sup>11</sup> The notion of tolerance contains a sense of difference and superiority. 'I tolerate you, because I am great, I could punish you, but because of my superiority and greatness, I do not punish you.' This is the sense expressed in the ordinary and non-stipulated use of the term 'tolerance'. But the fact of acceptance expresses the essential identity; a kind of understanding with a sense of love, and the so-called difference in the 'other' is only a superimposition.

Service to others, worshipping them as God, illumines one's selfish ego and elevates oneself. As Swami Bhajananda rightly points out, this transition philosophically enriches us in providing room for 'all efforts at self-improvement and development, development of personality, striving for success'.<sup>12</sup> According

to Swami Narasimhananda, philosophical investigations make us aware that 'change in religion is essentially a change in its form. ... The forms in which these values are practised and also the method in which they are preached are all that keep changing. Innovations in religious traditions should focus more on the comprehension of the values of a particular faith tradition. Forms are secondary and many times irrelevant. The secret of the fulfilment of spiritual life lies within the aspirant and not without.'<sup>13</sup>

Today religious fundamentalists are going stronger and forcefully disapprove different indigenous cultural histories. However, by saying this we do not call for defaming or blaming the people nurturing any particular religious faith. We may recall here a distinctive historian and philosopher, Theodore Zeldin, who says: 'Hostility between the religions was generated by learned theologians, who studied the ancient books, recreating what they believed to be a purer doctrine, and urging obedience to it as a cure for all discontents.'<sup>14</sup> Failure to catch the base tone of diversity leads life to a state of unthinkable danger. In life, one has to perform in a complex situation in the midst of unending diversity. Future logic seldom remains exclusively programmed. New scenario arises before us. We need to deal with them based on their own character. The fundamentalists deal with them in an opposite manner. They seek to view everything from a particular standpoint, ostensibly pouring in a mould, commensurate with their narrow mindset. They misuse politics and institutional religion as a means of capturing power. They consider dogmatic belief to be the best.

But today we need to solve contemporary problems with creativity in order to find peace in this world. The passage of reasonableness handed down by the Indian tradition may show us the way out. The advantages of the rationale behind

innate native Indian culture and that of tolerance of the other cultures, in the sense of alternative acceptable discourse, can be adopted. We cannot deny that we are living in a world, which is gradually becoming more and more dangerous. In this scenario the notion of 'traditional modernity' is very significant. It contains the past as well as claims freedom from the past. It is the method of 'distancing nearness'<sup>15</sup> that is opposite to the concept of 'orthodoxy'. Those, who are against reforming or adding to the old practices and thoughts, become orthodox and ritualistic in the name of puritanism. They are opposed to progress.

One of our duties is to negate obstructions to the current of deliberation embedded with open-mindedness from being submerged in the mire of puritanism. As we obtain the old practices and thoughts through the Indian tradition, we should also get a proper mix of fresh knowledge and gift of science with values. This is because 'whatever is old is not always good'.<sup>16</sup> We are to enrich our own thinking and conduct considering the relevance of place and time.

This attitude of understanding of 'I-Other' relationship unfolds a new dimension in the logic of religious pluralism. How is it? In the words of Diana Eck, it 'is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences. ... Pluralism requires participation, and attunement to the life and energies of one another. ... Tolerance can create a climate of restraint but not one of understanding. Tolerance alone does little to bridge the chasms of stereotype and fear that may, in fact dominate the mutual image of the other.'<sup>17</sup> This pluralistic way of understanding shows us the way of understanding other with 'engagement, involvement, and participation'.

Through discussion we can understand that the standpoints of others are also alternatively correct; if I understand in one language, there are

equally other alternative languages and each one is alternatively sufficiently warranted.<sup>18</sup> It points to a common orientation to diversity and not to uniformity. Uniformity precludes differences, whereas unity can accommodate plural centres of consciousness on which different religions are stationed. I know that I am putting the old wine in a new bottle. But I am also arguing that 'the old bottles were still strong enough to hold the old vintage',<sup>19</sup> though they needed a cleaning-up.<sup>20</sup>

Let us now re-read the rich Indian pluralistic philosophic heritage to realise the always open, free, and potentially creative pluralistic mind and reshape ourselves in the light of the vision which enables us to see truth in others' views, in others' ways of life.<sup>21</sup>



## Notes and References

1. 'See Nilakantha Bhatta, *Vyavaharamayukha, Vyavaharamatrikah*: 'Nyayam-analochayato dosham-aha brihaspatih—Kevalam shastram-ashritya na kartavyo hi nirnayah, yuktihine vichare tu dharmahanih prajayate; Brihaspati tells the fault of not taking reason into consideration: The decision should not be given by merely relying on shastras, for in the case of a decision devoid of reasoning loss of dharma results.' Quoted in Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 5 vols (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973), 3.867. See *Vishnu Purana*, 3.18.31: 'Na hy aptavada nabhaso nipatanti mahasurah, yuktimad vacanam grahyam mayanyaish ca bhavadvidhaih; words of the competent do not, great asuras, fall from the sky. It is only words supported by reasons that should be admitted by me and others like yourselves.' Quoted in J Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and History of the People of India, Their Religion and Institutions*, 3 vols (London: Trubner, 1868), 3.128. See *Yogavasishtha*, 2.18.3: 'Yukti-yuktam upadeyam vachanam balakad-api, anyat trinam iva tyajyam apy uktam padmajanmana; statements supported by reasoning must be accepted even from a child. Everything else should be abandoned like grass, even if it has been said by the god Brahma.' Also see Rashbehari Das,

- Katipay Darshanik Prabandha* (Bengali) (Kolkata: Bangiya Darshan Parishad, 1978), 88.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.367.
  3. See W Julian Korab-Karpowicz, *Tractatus Politico-Philosophicus* (Kety, Poland: Derewiecki, 2015), 228.
  4. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught?* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), 4.
  5. See Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London: Penguin, 2007), 1–17.
  6. See John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: The Westminster, 1982), 71. Also see John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St Martins, 1985) and John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989).
  7. See Lord Buddha's advice to his disciples in Shantarakshita, *Tattvasamgraha*, 3587: 'Tapachchedachcha nikashat suvarnamiva panditaih, parikshya bhikkhavo grahyam madvacho, na tu gauravat; O bhikkus, accept my words not out of mere respect for me, but after testing them at the touchstone of reason, just as gold is accepted as true by the wise after heating, cutting, and rubbing against the touchstone.'
  8. Chandidas, *Padavali* (Bengali).
  9. Mahabharata, 12.288.20.
  10. Michael J Zenzen, 'Science, Hermeneutics, and Metaphorical Thought', *Hermeneutics and Science*, eds Márta Fehér, Olga Kiss, and László Ropolyi (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999), 291. Also see Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1985).
  11. *Complete Works*, 1.3.
  12. Swami Bhajanananda, 'Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna', *Journal of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Calcutta*, 9/10 (2009), 46.
  13. Swami Narasimhananda, 'Editorial: Customised Vedanta?', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 123 /3 (March 2018), 346.
  14. Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (Atlantic, 1994), 226.
  15. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*.
  16. Kalidasa, *Malavikagnimitram*, 1.13: 'Puranamityeva na sadhu sarvam, na chapi kavyam navam ityavadyam, santah parikshyanyataradbhajante mudhah parapratyayaneyabuddhih; all that is old is not good, nor is poetry bad because it is new. The wise accept something after properly examining it; fools are guided by the judgement of others.'
  17. Diana L Eck, *A New Religious America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 70.
  18. Professor Kalidas Bhattacharyya, *Possibility of Different Types of Religion* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1975), 9–14.
  19. A C Das, *Ramakrishna: A Modern Incarnation of God* (Calcutta: General, 1958), 251.
  20. We may sum up the issue of many religions and the apparently conflicting ideologies in the light of a pluralistic understanding of religion in the language of John Hick: 'The differences between the root concepts and experiences of different religions, their different and often conflicting historical and trans-historical beliefs, their incommensurable mythologies, and the diverse and ramifying belief-systems into which all these are built, are compatible with the pluralistic hypothesis that the great world traditions constitute different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human' John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989), 375–6.
  21. To explain the pluralistic hypothesis, we may take the analogy of a ferry. In the words of Nalini Devdas: 'The religion that the sadhaka has chosen is a ferry in which, with others he crosses the waters of samsara. But there is a point at which he must leave the ferry and leap alone to reach the shore. ... Only those who have taken the leap know without a shadow of doubt that the shore is the same for all. The individuality and uniqueness of each religious tradition is as essential as its existence' (Nalini Devdas, *Sri Ramakrishna*, (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1966), 104–5). See Rig Veda, 1.164.64: 'Ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti; truth is one, the wise call it variously.' And see Rig Veda, 1.89.10: 'A no bhadrah kratavo yantu vishvatah; let noble thoughts come to us from different directions.' Also see Bhagavadgita, 4.11: 'According to the manner in which they approach me, I favour them in that very manner. O son of Partha, human beings follow my path in every way.'

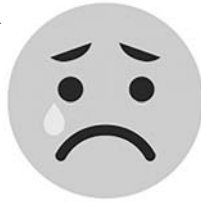
# YOUNG EYES

## *Please Don't Be Sad*

**W**E LOVE TO HEAR songs and almost all of the songs in India now come from movies. Then there are songs from outside India. Nowadays, all that you hear in songs is people crying that they did not get something, that they wish to have something, and that they are very sad because of all of this. No smiling faces, but only sad expressions. There is so much of pain in these songs. What happened to songs being sources of entertainment or songs being ways of cheering up oneself?

It is not just about songs though. Even movies are becoming difficult to watch. There is much violence, both physical and verbal. And there are the numerous problems shown on the screen. Movies made specifically for children or the teenagers also have so much negativity. Are we human beings becoming more and more negative? Have we lost the ability to take pleasure in all the small and big things that life has to offer?

People talk less and less today, thanks to the general obsession with electronic handheld devices, and even the little that people talk is only about problems and quarrels. Kids have to endure the great suffering and torture of having to watch these fights, arguments, and complaining. That is another thing about the present-day society. Everyone seems to be complaining. If someone has a complaint because of a problem, what should one do? They should go ahead and fix the problem, but people rarely do that. Instead, they just complain. They cry and wail and the sound of all this is so troubling.



Is it not the duty of the elders to ensure that kids get a joyous and all-round childhood? Instead of bombarding children with the problems of human life, why cannot the elders or parents be positive about the struggles of life and why cannot they give more and more positive examples of strength, courage, and wisdom? While children are nowadays exposed to all that is negative and sad in life, they are hardly shown role models, who have excelled in many facets of life in spite of having to struggle against all odds.

For example, since a child starts understanding things, parents and others around the child warn about strangers and about many other unwanted personalities that one may come across. It is understandable that children should be made aware and protected from harmful persons, but should not a child also be taught about the importance of human relationships? Instead of constantly being afraid of new people, should not a child also be taught to be trusting and give the benefit of doubt to people? An unwanted result of warning children against strangers and predators beyond a certain limit is that children isolate themselves and it becomes almost impossible for them to mix with people.

Does an adult, particularly a parent, know the amount of negative information and negative impact that a child gets through the present-day news and media, particularly the electronic media and Internet? It is always this problem, that issue, or some such other disturbing news that the media has to offer. And when the child turns to one's parents or other adults for some

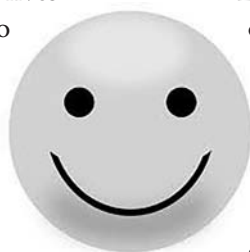


relief from this onslaught of negativity, there is more negativity in the form of chastising advice, having to watch parents quarrel, or worse still, a cold treatment with the parents or adults glued on to electronic screens.

All adults should learn to smile and if they already know how to do that, they have to show that on their faces. Those who were kids even a couple of decades ago, had much happier childhood. Life had problems even then, but there was more of contact with persons, more of interactions between family members. Kids loved to play with parents and parents showered their attention and love on their kids. Time spent with kids by adults was much more. And such times were moments of joy. There were chastisements, crying, and all other unpleasant aspects of life, but the moments of joy swept over these moments of despair.

About a couple of decades ago, the average kid was not exposed to so much negativity as today. There are two kinds of negativity, one that is spread by the media and the other brought in through the environment. There is so much competition, expectation, and demands in the life of an average child today that the child has no time to think of frivolous things or to be mischievous or doing all other things that children have been normally associated with.

It is probably the greatest and most unfortunate effect of seeing sadness all around that children do not behave or sound as children any more; they are so much like adults. The sadness thrust into their lives has shown them that this world is no place for playing, that toys are not much different from pastimes on the Internet or other modes of entertainment for the adults. The strained and sad lives of adults are robbing children of their childhood.



What should adults and parents do to ensure that children do not have to get exposed to sadness? First, they need to avoid being so sad themselves. They should be grateful to all the wonders that life brings us. They need to strive become role models of goodness and happiness and also models of resilience, people who can withstand the onslaught of any miserable suffering and yet cheerfully live with a buoyant spirit.

Please don't be sad. Please don't flood your environment with negativity. There is much negativity already. We should at least do our mite and put out our ideas of joy and happiness, however little they might be, and spread cheer around. We should live the lives we want others to lead and be models worthy of emulation. Let us move away from the habit of denouncing every little thing and instead let us appreciate even the small achievements of children. Let us encourage them to understand and discover newer vistas of human existence. Let us smile and spread laughter.

We should not hamper the free flow of the actions and ideas of children. We should only help them see their path. However, we should not completely leave children to themselves. We should guide and facilitate them to understand the boundaries one needs to keep in one's life and the choices one needs to make and danger zones one needs to avoid. Though roses have thorns, one could be trained to negotiate one's way through the thorns and reach the roses without getting hurt.

Letting children know the heritage of one's family, of their community, of their nations, and of humanity as a whole, is a good idea to let some good feeling percolate into their lives. Only such an approach would lead to children not ending up as stressed sad faces.

# BALABODHA

*Ancient Wisdom Made Easy*

## Viveka

THE WORD *viveka* is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word *viveka* is the faculty of discernment. In many Indian languages, it also means intelligence. However, it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word *viveka* is derived from the root word *vich* by adding a *vi* prefix. *Vich* means to sift, separate, deprive, discriminate, discern, or judge. *Viveka* means discrimination, judgement, discernment, discretion, consideration, discussion, investigation, distinction, difference, true knowledge, a receptacle for water, basin, reservoir, reflection, right judgement, and a water trough. *Viveka* also means the faculty of distinguishing and classifying things according to their real properties.

In Vedanta, *viveka* means the power of separating the invisible Brahman from the visible world, spirit from matter, truth from untruth, reality from mere semblance or illusion. *Viveka* also means the faculty of understanding the reality with certainty by distinguishing between entities that mutually superimpose one another just like the principles of Prakriti and Purusha. It is the ability to discern the Self or Atman from the empirical world. *Viveka* is the discernment between the real and the unreal that leads to

the understanding that Brahman alone is real and everything other than Brahman is unreal. It also means the faculty of distinguishing between righteous and unrighteous actions. It means the understanding of the true state of affairs.

*Viveka* is considered to be one of the four qualities necessary for a spiritual aspirant. The quartet of these qualities are called *sadhana-chatushtaya*, the quartet of *sadhana*. The other three qualities are *vairagya*, dispassion; *shama-adi-shatka-sampattih*, the sextet of the wealth of virtues beginning with *shama*, calming of the mind; and *mumukshutva*, the desire for moksha. The quality of *viveka* has been emphasised as the starting point for the beginning of a spiritual or religious life. *Viveka* presupposes deep thinking, which helps a person understand the ephemeral nature of everything that is perceived, the entire universe. Once a person becomes aware of the repetitive and cyclical nature of suffering that is bound to be experienced during a lifetime, one desperately seeks a way out of this cycle of suffering.

*Viveka* is not a one-time process. One has to constantly engage in discernment throughout one's life till one dies. The need for this incessant practice of *viveka* is *avidya*, primal ignorance, which clouds our mind and leads it to believe that the unreal is real and the truly real, that is the Atman, is unreal. The *parama-hansa*, the mythical swan is credited with possessing the highest degree of *viveka*, because of which it can separate milk from water. It is by constant questioning and critical thinking that *viveka* can be practised.

PB

# TRADITIONAL TALES

## *Vyasa's Kashi Visit*

**L**ORD SHIVA RESIDES AS Vishvanath in Kashi. The Divine Mother with a jewelled hand dwells there as Annapurna. Since Lord Vishvanath was the lord and Annapurna was the goddess of the place of pilgrim that is Kashi, all people living in Kashi were always prosperous and content. Not only were they prosperous, they were also role models of charity. All visitors to Kashi returned after having sumptuous meals and receiving the choicest gifts. Thus, Kashi's fame spread throughout India.

Sage Vyasa has done a great service to the Sanatana Dharma by classifying the Vedas into four and by writing the Mahabharata and the Puranas. He heard people often highly praising Kashi in this manner: 'There are no hungry people in Kashi. Wealthy and prosperous people there continuously give away much in charity.' Having heard many people speak about Kashi in this manner many times, Vyasa thought: 'What! Can there be a place so glorious in this world? I am going to check for myself the truth of the claims that people make about Kashi.' Just like a scientist tests the claims heard from others in one's laboratory, Vyasa set out to test directly the greatness of Kashi.

Vyasa informed his disciples about his proposed Kashi visit. Upon hearing this decision of their guru, the one thought that was uppermost in the disciples' minds was that they would get to savour varieties of delicious dishes. Hence, they were highly enthusiastic about Vyasa's decision to visit Kashi. All these disciples left with Vyasa for Kashi with great expectations. One morning, Vyasa and his disciples reached Kashi. First, they found a resting place in a charity inn. Then they

bathed in River Ganga and set out to seek alms in different parts of the city.

That evening Vyasa and his disciples returned to the inn with faces withered by hunger. They began sharing amongst themselves, their experiences about the parts of the city they went to seeking alms and how they were treated. Then, all of them realised that none of them could get even a morsel of food while seeking alms. This greatly surprised them and they could not believe it. One of the disciples said: 'Probably, giving alms by householders on this day has been prohibited by the scriptures. That is why no one gave us alms.' Another disciple countered: 'There is no day on which alms-giving has been prohibited by the scriptures.'

Hearing this discussion, Vyasa said: 'Today, what has happened has happened. Let us wait and watch what happens tomorrow.' Thus all of them remained hungry that day. The next day, Vyasa and his disciples wandered from street to street in search of alms. The residents of some houses replied: 'We do not have anything to give in alms.' Some others slammed their doors on the faces of Vyasa's disciples. Vyasa and all of his disciples had similar experiences that day. This made them dejected, insulted, and sad. In this manner, they went hungry the second day too. The third day also they had experiences like the previous couple of days. Thus, seven days passed.

On the eighth day, Vyasa stood before a house, asking for alms. However, the residents of that house did not seem to take notice of Vyasa's calls. No one came out of that house, nor did anyone give alms. Seeing this, Vyasa, who had been

patient for seven days, became greatly angered. He lifted his right hand with the intention to give a big curse to all the people living in Kashi. At that very moment opened the door of a palatial house in front of him. The mistress of the house, who had opened the door, said to Vyasa: 'Please stop!' What a wonder! Vyasa could not lower his raised hand. For some moments both of them looked at one other in silence. Then, that woman smiled at Vyasa, and he could lower his hand.

That woman said to Vyasa: 'There is no point in your getting angry on this place of pilgrimage without any reason.' Vyasa replied: 'What? Is there no cause for my anger? We are staying hungry here without any alms for the last seven days. Of all these people living in this city, not one came forward to give us alms. That being the situation, why should I not be angry? Why should I not curse?'

That woman said with a smile: 'Please bring all your disciples to my house. I would be very happy if I get the opportunity to serve you with a feast.' Vyasa thought it better to accept her invitation than to argue with her in vain. Thus, he accepted her offer and proceeded to meet his disciples at the charity inn. There he saw that his disciples did not have the strength even to move for accepting alms, because they were emaciated, not having eaten anything for seven days. They were half dead. However, they listened to Vyasa and soon reached the woman's house. She welcomed them as a mother and made Vyasa and his disciples sit in a large seating area. Vyasa and his disciples sat there on the line of seats arranged there.

At the command of the mistress of the house, servants put plantain leaf-plates in front of the guests along with glasses of drinking water. However, no food was served. Confused at this, all of them stared blankly at the woman, who stared back at them and said: 'Why are you not eating? Please start eating.' At this Vyasa's anger knew no bounds and he started to tell something to the woman. At that moment, he saw that varieties of dishes had appeared on all the leaf-plates, each of them getting the dish they liked the most. All of them ate to their heart's content and looked towards the woman to thank her. And lo! Instead of her was standing there the compassionate form of the Divine Mother, Annapurna. By her side was the father of the universe, the Vishvanath of Kashi.

Lord Shiva told Vyasa: 'Do you understand why you and your disciples underwent so much suffering? None of you set on this pilgrimage with sincerity and devotion. You, the great Vyasa, came here to see a great wonder and eager to test for yourself Kashi's glory. For your disciples, your reason for the pilgrimage was only on the surface of their minds. They came here with great greed. Is it proper to travel to Kashi with such thoughts? Had you come here with devotion, you might have got many spiritual experiences.'

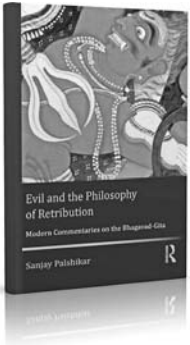
Vyasa realised his mistake. He and his disciples prostrated with devotion to Kashi Vishvanath and Mother Annapurna, who had appeared before them, and set forth for their home.




*Temple in Kashi where  
Sage Vyasa Performed  
Spiritual Practices*



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



***Evil and the Philosophy of Retribution: Modern Commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita***  
Sanjay Palshikar

Routledge, 912 Tolstoy House, 15-17 Tolstoy Marg, Connaught Place, New Delhi 110 001. Website: <https://www.routledge.com>. 2014. 192 pp. ₹ 685. HB. ISBN 9781138499805.

Theodicy is not the forte of contemporary Indian thinkers. They are able to identify evils but cannot provide a satisfactory *raison d'être* for the existence of these evils. Sanjay Palshikar is able to weave a tenable theodicy in the book under review. This is no mean task since he shows how through a study of the problem of evil, one can contest the Marxist idea that India was never one nation. Palshikar's primary sources are difficult to find elsewhere but his success as a contemporary political scientist lies in forming a satisfactory theodicy. Retribution within this Indian theodicy becomes itself an effective tool qua answer to the problem of evil because Palshikar foregrounds his study of evil within India's colonial past. The binaries of Hinduism as a life-affirming force on the one hand and British hegemony as a destabilising force on the other hand, find their resolutions in this book.

Palshikar is somewhat more an heir to Feuerstein than he is to any other thinker. He has the good sense to bring in the esoteric system of Sri Aurobindo's reworking of tantra to answer a holistic Indian theodicy to the specific problem(s) of evil, which arose in India.

Within the Abrahamic religions this diversity of answers is not needed since the very definition of the problem of evil is straightforward. Western theodicy is straitjacketed into a secular Enlightenment approach or an earlier, religious approach.

Indian philosophies with no exception see life

as being 'purposeless' or 'pointless'. Indian thinkers have always known that life has a meaning, a telos, a certain numinosity in it. Therefore, Indian philosophers have tackled with the non-secular qua non-Enlightenment form of the problem of evil. Palshikar understands this and his book is a rebuttal to McEwan's kind of angst-ridden diatribe.

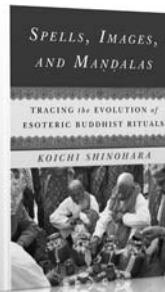
Whereas within India there were no distinctions between the Enlightenment concept of the secular with the Sanatana Dharma permeating the woof of Indian society, Palshikar has to be credited for not straitjacketing Indian theodicy like Doniger did earlier. Rather, Palshikar nearly does the impossible: he provides us with a unity in diversity answer to Indian theodicy, which is more authentic to India's variegated spirit of philosophical and theological enquiry. The problematics of defining the problem of evil within Indian systems of thought is itself too onerous for one person to negotiate. Palshikar has been able to negotiate through a huge range of theodicies drawing not only from established Hindu primary sources but also from vernacular folk-philosophy. Herein lies the importance of this book as a needed disruptor within the domain of theodicy.

*Subhasis Chattopadhyay*

Psychoanalyst

Assistant Professor of English

Narasinha Dutt College, Howrah.



***Spells, Images, and Mandalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals***

Koichi Shinohara

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023. 2014. 352 pp. \$60.00. HB. ISBN 9780231166140.

Tantric Indian Buddhism is at the heart of Esoteric Buddhism, which Koichi Shinohara

acknowledges and maps in the book under review. And, as he points out, his work is to construct a hermeneutics of praxes of these esoteric rituals that needed structural scrutiny. Before Shinohara, none had done this cultural work within the field of Chan Buddhism. He does this work of structural analysis without losing sight of the supernatural elements involved in this form of Buddhism.

To see the importance of Shinohara's approach to Buddhism one has to see the works of Robert Wright, whose life's job is to throw out the baby, the numinous in this case, with the bathwater. Wright too studies Buddhism but has no respect for Buddhist ritual practices since unlike Shinohara, Wright is unwilling to acknowledge that Avalokiteshvara exists, leave alone other Buddhist deities. Shinohara never doubts the truths of Chan Buddhism and has devoted a chapter to a particular manifestation of Avalokiteshvara in his book.

Envisioning of deities within a ritually sanctified space, mandala, through chanting *dharanis*, mantras, and then dismissing these deities, is clearly described by Shinohara without losing academic rigour. His focus in this book is the rich image culture within esoteric Buddhism, and to this end, he has brought to his audience a rich collection of accompanying images, fascicles, without which this book would not be today's standard textbook and resource archive for specific Chinese Buddhist rituals. Shinohara's grasp of the subject is so strong that this book will remain the only meaningful text in English within the domain of esoteric Buddhism for some time to come.

A reviewer works within her or his particular socio-economic and cultural framework. This reviewer being a Hindu, feels that Shinohara's book opens up the space for a better understanding of Hindu tantra and Sri Vidya. In both these latter systems, mandalas and yantras are of primary significance. And Shinohara is clear that esoteric Buddhism owes a lot to Hindu tantra. Scholars of Hindu tantra will understand much about their domains from this book.

The invoking of Buddhist deities ultimately leading to the merging of these deities with the worshipper is exactly how Hindu tantra affects transformation of the practitioner of Hindu tantra through esoteric rituals. And *dharanis* or

mantras are understood within Hindu tantra as being loaded with energy, which subtly change one's environment. An analogy will make this clear. If someone is always sad, the atmosphere around this person becomes heavy with sorrow. But happy people, who are content with their lives, can cheer up a roomful of pessimists. Thus, there is indeed something in these spells that does transform lives. The practitioners of Hindu tantra know that the multiple universes bubbling into and out of existence every moment began with a first primal vibration which Georg Feuerstein in another context, terms as the 'singularity'.

Shinohara is a scholar of Buddhism and all Buddhist tantra is based on the theory of dependent origination or *pratityasamutpada*. Hindu tantra in all its various forms does not agree with the Buddhists' understanding of nothingness or *sunyata*. If Hindu scholars read this book, then apart from diverging from the concept of *pratityasamutpada*, they will find in Shinohara an intellect appreciative of Hindu tantra.

In the final analysis, Buddhist tantra derives from Indian Hindu tantra, which was first remoulded by Atisha Dipankara, who in turn reworked Shaktism into the woof of Buddhist tantra, Vajrayana. As Shinohara points out, the sutras he comments on and the spells he interrogates have taken form over centuries in a process of gradual accretion of apocryphal materials, which have also incorporated pre-Buddhist Chöd praxes. The point here is that pre-Buddhist Chöd, and extant Hindu tantric rituals are symbiotic. This aspect of esoteric Buddhism has not been mentioned by Shinohara. Otherwise, this book is an excellent volume for those interested in the evolution of esoteric Buddhism in China.

Swami Narasimhananda of the Ramakrishna Mission pointed out to this reviewer through electronic correspondence that Shinohara's thesis rests on the Hindu exhortation: '*Devo bhutva devam yajet*; worship God by becoming God.' In the final analysis, Chinese esoteric Buddhism and pre-Buddhist Chöd is this Hindu exhortation refashioned to suit the particular topology, where deity envisioning through mandalas or yantras were done.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

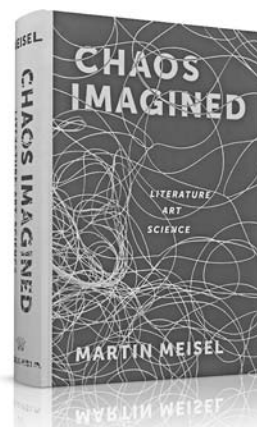
# MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.  
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

## ***Chaos Imagined:* Literature, Art, Science**

Martin Meisel

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023. 2016. xvi + 585 pp. \$45. HB. ISBN 9780231166324.



**W**HAT CHAOS REALLY IS, in and of itself, and what sort of figure it truly cuts in the universe at large—an open question—is not something I know how to address. The *notion* of chaos is a different matter. The notion of chaos in its most general and traditional framing is a limiting case: the extreme of disorder, where all attributes assignable to order vanish. It is disorder made absolute. It follows from a desire to give shape or a name to our perceptions of discontinuity and dissonance, of confusion and incoherence, perhaps to quarantine them from what belongs to symmetry, shapeliness, and consequence. To attempt to represent chaos at the full, as surprisingly many have done, is a desperate business requiring a good deal of poetic imagination. To attempt to set out the shape of that lawless condition is on the face of it a paradoxical undertaking, like that of Descartes rationalizing the passions or Freud making us conscious of the unconscious, since it seems to entail the undoing of the essential character of the given.

Not what chaos really is, but the imagination of chaos, and some of the stratagems for its representation in the mindspace of our history, are what I have in mind to explore. Art and literature in this respect offer as rich a field of inquiry as philosophy and science. Indeed, the formal separation of these categories at some point in the Western tradition (the tradition to which I chiefly but not

entirely confine myself) clearly will not work for such as Hesiod, Plato, Ovid, Lucretius. Moreover, even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it scarcely makes sense to consider the representations of chaos in the work of Goethe, Turner, Carlyle, Zola, Henry Adams, Beckett, Pynchon, and Cage, and in the work of Kelvin, Clausius, Gibbs, Boltzman, Heisenberg, Gödel, and Feigenbaum, as if they could only be understood as science or imagination but not both. Indeed, if poetry and cosmogony were once happily married in ancient thought, they are at the very least freely cohabiting in modern physics and cosmology.

My special but far from exclusive interest is the representation of chaos in literature and art, with the thought that in the enterprise of imagining chaos it is the artist who has had to take most seriously the obligation of making chaos concrete. The mind moves readily to the abstract notion of absolute disorder, but it meets a stiff resistance, probably in its own constitution, when it comes to the concrete imagining of such a condition. I doubt that anyone could better convey the difficulty of *really* imagining chaos than St Augustine in his confessions:

I conceived of it as having innumerable forms and diverse, and therefore indeed did I not at all conceive of it in my mind ... my mind tossed up and down certain ugly and hideous forms, all out of order, but yet forms they were notwithstanding;

and this I called without form ... true reason did persuade me, that I must utterly uncase it of all remnants of forms whatsoever, if so be I meant to conceive a matter absolute without form: and I could not. For sooner could I imagine that not to be at all, which should be deprived of all form, than once conceive there was likely to be anything betwixt form and nothing; a matter neither formed not nothing; formless, almost nothing.

Augustine, as serious about eliminating form in his pursuit of chaos as any Dadaist looking to extirpate meaning, here names some of the common strategies, or to him evasions, for its representation: endless multiplication and diversification, creating a jumble of forms, creating monsters, and pursuing the *via negativa* until it runs aground in a shadowy approximation of nothing.


Conceiving chaos—Augustine's concern—has a no less troublesome partner in the perceiving of it. For most of us the perception of chaos, of unmitigated disorder, appears to go much against the grain. Though in politics and morals and in aesthetics we are quick to cry chaos, it is only the word that comes easily. It is hard not to find some semblance of rhythm, some vestige of form and purpose, some seemingly selective regularity, in what experience offers. We are pattern-seeking, pattern-making animals who live and adapt by making sense of things and who break old patterns only to make new ones. We hear relations in aleatory music, we see rhythms in the action of paint, we feel conspiracy in the workings of chance.

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville's grand epic of the consuming need to find a meaning—however terrible—in the universe of experience, the author posts an exemplum of that human imperative near the head of the text. In chapter 2, Ishmael describes entering the Spouter Inn, where he encounters 'a very large oil-painting, so thoroughly be-smoked, and every way defaced, that in the unequal cross-lights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic

visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbours, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose.' A first near-thought in the presence of 'such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows' is that 'some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New England hags, had endeavoured to delineate chaos bewitched. But by dint of much and earnest contemplation, and oft repeated ponderings, and especially by throwing open the little window towards the back of the entry, you at last came to the conclusion that such an idea, however wild, might not be altogether unwarranted.' Ishmael's last sentence does not culminate in the expected conclusion, though surely a deep reluctance to *see* unmeaning chaos lies in its hedged and qualified final clause, after the valiant many-sided effort inscribed in its opening.

Even with chaos so begrudgingly allowed as the possible subject of the image, the viewer cannot permit himself to rest. Puzzled and confounded, Ishmael continues:

A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet there was a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through.—It's the Black Sea in a midnight gale.—It's the unnatural combat of the four primal elements.—It's a blasted heath.—It's a Hyperborean winter scene.—It's the breaking-up of the ice-bound stream of Time. But at last all these fancies yielded to that one portentous something in the picture's midst. That once found out, and all the rest were plain. But stop; does it not bear a faint resemblance to a gigantic fish? Even the great Leviathan himself?

The catalogue is exhausting if not exhaustive, and it represents, albeit as comedy, the mind's restless inventiveness in the face of the persistently, suggestively, inchoate. 



# REPORTS

## **New Math Sub-centre**

A sub-centre of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, has been started under the name ‘**Ramakrishna Math, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri**’ on a piece of land adjoining the campus of the newly opened branch of Ramakrishna Mission in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri, Telangana. The contact details of the sub-centre are the same as those of the Mission centre, namely ‘Saradanagar, Dist. Yadadri Bhuvanagiri, Telangana 508126’, phone: 79016 96801 and email: <yadadri.bhuvanagiri@rkmm.org>.

## **Values Education and Youth Programmes**

**Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture (RMIC), Kolkata** conducted the following programmes from April 2017 to March 2018: 1) **Youth Conferences:** the Institute organised 210 youth conferences and 12 school-level youth conferences in 17 districts of West Bengal covering Kolkata, South 24-Parganas, Howrah, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, Uttar Sundarban, Hooghly, Purba-Medinipur, Paschim-Medinipur, Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia, Uttar-Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar. A total of 39,831 youths, both male and female, participated and 48,500 copies of values education books published by the Institute were distributed free of cost among the delegates including teachers and guardians attending these conferences and thirteen district-level youth conferences were also held. During these district-level youth conferences, cultural competitions of elocution, recitation, drawing, and music were also organised and the prizes were distributed to the winners. 2) **Teachers Conferences:** Three teacher’s conferences were held. Altogether 410 teachers participated. 3) **Guardian’s Conferences:** Twelve guardian’s conferences were held. Altogether 2,122 guardians, both male



*New Dispensary Building at Kankurgachhi Yogodyan*

and female, participated. 4) **Central Youth Conference:** A central youth conference was organised by the Institute on 23 December 2017. A total of 900 delegates and 350 observers from all over West Bengal participated in the conference. 5) **Distribution of Books:** The following Bengali books were distributed among the youth delegates including the teachers and guardians, who attended these conferences. 1. *Sabar Swamiji*: 5,000 copies; 2. *Swami Vivekananda Manishider Chokhe*: 2,600 copies; 3. *Adarsha Chhatra Jiban*: 6,500 copies; 4. *Bharater Nivedita*: 12,000 copies; 5. *Yuva-nayak Vivekananda*: 5,000 copies; 6. *Swamiji O Tar Vani*: 2,200 copies; 7. *Swami Vivekanander Bharat Pratyabartan*: 13,000 copies; 8. *Jago Vir*: 2,200 copies; a total of 48,500 copies of books. 6) **Vivekananda Anushilan Classes:** These classes are aimed at imparting moral, spiritual, and cultural values to the youths in accordance with the Indian ethos and the universal teaching of Swami Vivekananda. These classes were regularly conducted by the Institute among the youths of the age group 15–30 years, on every Saturday. 43 classes were held; and a total of 2,393 youths, both boys and girls, attended. 7) **Academic Counselling:** To help unfocused students, the Institute is conducting academic counselling with the help of experienced psychiatrists since 2009. 53 new students got enrolled during the above-mentioned period.

**Delhi** centre conducted: 1) 15 values education workshops in Assam, Delhi, Goa, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh between 29 September and 27 November 2018, attended by 734 teachers in all, and 2) 25 values education workshops in Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh,

Maharashtra, Odisha, and West Bengal between 28 November and 22 December, which were attended by 1,291 teachers and 43 principals in all.

**Rajkot** centre held 1) nine values education programmes, five on its own premises and the rest in four schools in Rajkot, between 23 September and 7 October. The programmes were attended by 1,875 students, 2) six values education programmes between 3 and 8 December. The programmes were attended by 321 students.

**Sarisha** centre conducted a personality development programme for the youth on 2 September, which was attended by 220 youths.

**Madurai Math** conducted a personality development camp on 24 December in which 140 girls from a school in Madurai took part.

**Medinipur** centre held 10 values education workshops in and around Medinipur in the month of December, which were attended by nearly 4,000 students.

**Nagpur Math** conducted four students' conventions in different villages of Gadchiroli district on 17, 18, and 19 December. In all, about 1,000 students attended the conventions.

**Thrissur Math** conducted a personality development programme for youths on 29 December. Sri Kummanam Rajasekharan, Governor of Mizoram, inaugurated the event, and Padma Vibhushan Dr E Sreedharan delivered the keynote address. About 200 youths took part in the programme.

### **Commemoration of the 125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA**

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: **In India: Bengaluru:** An art exhibition on 'Swamiji's participation in the World's Parliament of Religions' from 23 to 26 December, which was visited by about 3,000 people. A coffee-table book on the exhibits was

also released in the inaugural function of the exhibition. **Chennai Students' Home:** Cultural competitions on 30 November in which 134 students from 13 primary schools participated. **Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya:** (i) Cultural competitions in 15 schools and colleges in Coimbatore between 17 October and 19 December. In all, 3,010 students took part in the competitions. At all the venues, the competitions were followed by a talk, an awards ceremony, and a skit. (ii) A three-day residential youths' convention from 30 November to 2 December in which 475 youths participated. **Cooch Behar:** Two half-day conventions for devotees and youths on 12 December, which were attended by about 300 devotees and students. **Mangaluru:** Lectures at 16 colleges in Mangaluru, which were attended by about 3,500 youths. **Mysuru:** Two workshops on 5 and 11 December in which a total of 435 students participated. **Narainpur:** A three-day national-level tribal youths' convention on 18, 19, and 20 December in which 2,198 registered delegates, along with about 1,000 others, took part. **Pune:** A mega musical play at Nagpur on 11 December on the life and teachings of Swamiji which was attended by about 7,000 people. **Vijayawada:** Cultural competitions from August to December in which about 40,000 students from 350 schools in four districts of Andhra Pradesh took part. The winners in the final round of the competitions were awarded prizes in a students' convention held on 15 December. About 700 students, teachers and others attended the convention. **Outside India: Bourne End, UK:** Two workshops at the centre on 1 and 8 December in which about 150 people participated, and a public meeting in London on 2 December. **Colombo, Sri Lanka:** A public meeting in an auditorium in Batticaloa on 10 November in which about 5,000 students participated. The centre also conducted cultural competitions in Maskeliya town on 19 and 24 November in which 750 students from 35

schools took part, and a procession in that town on 20 December in which 800 people participated.

### **Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita**

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: **Chennai Math:** A talk and cultural programmes on 28 October, which were attended by 250 people. **Gadadhar Ashrama:** A special lecture on 28 October attended by 80 people. **Kankurgachhi:** A devotees' convention on 11 November attended by about 800 devotees. **Rajkot:** A seminar on Sister Nivedita on 28 October in which about 600 people took part. **Mumbai:** A day-long programme at a public auditorium in Mumbai on 29 November which included talks, a panel discussion, a screening of a documentary, and cultural events. About 700 people, mostly students, were in attendance. **Saradapitha:** A three-day residential youths' camp on 29, 30, and 31 December, which was inaugurated by Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and attended by about 350 youths.

### **Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)**

NSS students of **Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya** conducted awareness campaigns in 5 villages of Coimbatore district between 25 September and 1 October. The Vidyalaya students also cleaned a public road on 6 October.

**Kamarpukur** centre held cleanliness drives at its village on 28 October and 25 November.

### **News of Branch Centres**

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Bardhaman** conducted a medical camp at Jhikardanga village on 6 November in which 460 people were treated.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati** held a medical camp on 25 October for patients

suffering from skin diseases. In all, 152 patients were examined by six specialist doctors.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kailashahar** conducted two medical camps, one on its premises on 9 November and another on 10 November at a school. In all, 871 patients were treated by six specialist doctors in the camps.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur** held a football tournament from 16 to 22 October in which 12 teams, mostly from different villages of Narainpur, played.

**Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, USA,** recently carried out a major renovation of its Old Temple. The California Heritage Council presented a certificate to the centre on 24 October in appreciation for the work of restoration and preservation of the temple.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Faridpur, Bangladesh,** celebrated the centenary of its primary school, Mahakali Pathashala, on 11 November. Swami Suvirananda presided over the meeting attended by a number of monks and former students of the school.

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new book showroom at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka** on 25 November.

Swami Suvirananda laid the foundation stone for the proposed dispensary building at Narail sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Jessore, Bangladesh,** on 9 November.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Bankura** held a blood donation camp on 28 October in which 43 people donated blood.

Sri Tathagata Roy, Governor of Meghalaya, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Visakhapatnam** on 13 November.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj,

President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission inaugurated the new building 'Atma Vikas' for the Sports Science, Yoga, and Fitness Centre at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, RKMVERI**, deemed-to-be-university, **Belur**, on 31 October.

In the concluding phase of the year-long centenary celebration of **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Karimganj** from 1 to 5 December, the centre held two public meetings, a procession, *narayana-seva*—large-scale feeding of people, and cultural events. Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, unveiled a statue of Swamiji on the centre's campus and also dedicated the new puja-*mandap* and a multipurpose building on 1 December. A number of monks and about 35,000 devotees and well-wishers attended the programmes.

The Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi** observed World Soil Day on 5 December. In the function held on this occasion, the village Dhurleta in Ranchi district, where the ashrama had undertaken many initiatives to promote organic farming, was declared as the 'first organic village of Jharkhand state'.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** held tournaments in adapted volleyball, cricket, and football, from 6 to 8 December. In all, 361 differently-abled persons from different districts of Tamil Nadu participated in the tournaments. Further, the Vidyalaya in collaboration with Tamil Nadu Powerlifting Association conducted a state-level powerlifting championship on 16 December in which 122 youths from 32 colleges in Tamil Nadu participated.

The new guesthouse at **Ramakrishna Math, Antpur** was inaugurated on 8 December.

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj

inaugurated the new dining-hall at **Ramakrishna Math, Ichapur** on 8 December.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj dedicated two high school buildings of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur** at Akabeda and Kundla villages of Abujhmarh on 8 December.

The first floor of the monks' quarters of **Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar** was inaugurated on 12 December.

Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the staff quarters at **Ramakrishna Math, Gourhati** on 12 December.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj dedicated the new dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Math (Yogodyan), Kankurgachhi** on 12 December.

The new six-storey building at **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata**, was dedicated on 17 December. The building will be used for the nursing school and college, and also as an annexe to the operation theatre complex.

**Ramakrishna Math (Balaram Mandir), Kolkata** observed the 175th birth anniversary of Balaram Bose on 21 December. Swami Survirananda and some other monks and scholars spoke in the public meeting held on this occasion.

Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the new office-cum-book-showroom building at **Ramakrishna Math, Lalgurh** on 25 December.

Two students of the school of **Ramakrishna Mission, Imphal** secured the first and second positions at the state level in a painting competition on the theme 'conservation of energy' conducted by the Ministry of Power, Government of India, on 14 November. Subsequently, one of them also won a prize at the national level of the competition and received a certificate and a sum of 10,000 rupees in a function



held in Delhi on National Energy Conservation Day, 14 December.

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj laid the foundation stone for the proposed Sri Ramakrishna temple at **Baliati** centre, **Bangladesh**, on 20 November.

## Relief

**Winter Relief:** 2,146 blankets were distributed to poor people through the following centres: 1. **Bhopal:** 500, 21 to 27 October; 2. **Chandipur:** 46, 15 October; 3. **Dibrugarh:** 100, 18 November; 4. **Gourhati:** 500, 9 October to 26 November; 5. **Guwahati:** 500, 18 to 27 November; 6. **Ramharipur:** 300, 2 October; 7. **Sikra-Kulin-gram:** 200, 21 October to 25 November.

**Economic Rehabilitation: Zambia: Lusaka** centre handed over two sewing machines to two poor and needy persons on 1 November.

**Flood Relief: India: Karnataka and Kerala:** Centres continued relief operations among the families affected by the severe floods that had hit the two states in August 2018: **Karnataka: Pon-nampet** centre distributed 4,015 kg rice, 1,808 kg flour/rice flakes, 1,756 kg dal, 2,810 kg vegetables, 283 kg assorted spices, 710 litres of edible oil, 592 kg milk powder, 167 kg tea leaves, 619 kg sugar, 10,631 bakery products, 13,360 packaged food items, 9,984 packets of fruit juice, 4,440 litres of water, 471 assorted utensils, 1,392 saris, 6,247 assorted garments, 9,660 assorted household items, 15,923 sanitary items, 694 solar torches, and 2,062 stationery items among 1,492 families in Kodagu district from 1 to 16 September. **Kerala: Kalady** centre distributed 100 dhotis, 4,200 lungis, 6,609 shirts, 6,271 trousers, 50 saris, 4,978 tops, 4,325 other ladies' garments, and 4,000 sets of utensils (each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle) among 4,244 families in Ernakulam and Thrissur districts from 15 August to 28 November. **Kochi**

centre distributed 180 dhotis, 752 shirts, 1,208 T-shirts, 1,586 trousers, 15 sweaters, 25 shorts, 530 ladies' garments, and 180 bedsheets among 1,604 families, and 66,502 notebooks, 40,800 pens, and 5,040 geometry boxes among 11,877 students in Ernakulam, Kollam, and Pathanamthitta districts from 16 August to 5 December. **Koyilandy** centre distributed 1,765 shirts and 1,800 saris among 900 families in Kozhikode district on 26 December. **Thrissur** centre distributed 1,000 sets of utensils (each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle) among 1,000 families, and 35,280 notebooks, 5,400 pens, 5,040 geometry boxes, 3,000 children's books, and 115 umbrellas among 12,017 students in Ernakulam and Thrissur districts from 1 October to 13 December. **Tiruvalla** centre distributed 905 sets of utensils (each set containing a pressure cooker, 2 pots, 5 plates, 2 cups, 3 tumblers, 5 spoons, and a ladle) among 905 families, and 93,140 notebooks, 45,230 pens, and 6,922 geometry boxes among 11,118 students in Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts from 1 October to 13 November. **Sri Lanka:** In response to flooding of Visuvamadu village in Mullaitivu district, **Colombo** centre distributed 1,000 kg rice, 440 kg dal, 385 kg noodles, 540 packets of biscuits, 480 kg milk powder, 1,875 packets of malt powder, 330 kg sugar, 370 mats, 65 buckets, 65 mugs, 365 bedsheets, 1,920 matchboxes, 1,650 packets of tooth powder, and 800 notebooks among 194 families on 29 and 30 December.


**Cyclone Relief: Tamil Nadu:** In the wake of the devastating Cyclone Gaja, the following centres conducted relief services: **Kanchipuram** centre distributed 4,800 kg rice, 480 kg dal, 480 kg tamarind, 240 litres of edible oil, 480 packets asafoetida, 588 kg of assorted spices, 480 kg salt, and 480 kg sugar among 480 families in Thanjavur district on 8 December. **Madurai** centre distributed 1,000 kg rice, 600 kg wheat flour, 100

kg semolina, 150 kg dal, 150 litres of edible oil, 1,100 packets of biscuits, 536 shirts, 636 trousers, 300 lungis, 750 saris, 450 bedsheets, and 300 ladies' garments among 300 families in Mannargudi and Thiruvavur districts on 16 December.

**Flood Rehabilitation: Kerala: Koyilandy** centre gave 80 kg cement, 70 kg corrugated sheets, 274 kg iron beams, 25 litres of paint, 347 meters of wooden beam, and other construction materials to a poor family in Kozhikode district from 1 October to 15 December.

**Winter Relief:** The following centres distributed blankets and winter garments to needy people: **India: Aalo:** 144 blankets, 1,833 jackets, and 401 sweaters from 24 May to 16 December. **Antpur:** 500 sweaters from 30 November to 10 December. **Asansol:** 400 blankets, 115 jackets, and 100 sweaters from 8 October to 5 November. **Aurangabad:** 100 blankets on 16 December. **Bagda:** 500 blankets from 25 November to 16 December. **Bamunmura:** 700 blankets on 11 and 18 November. **Barasat:** 500 blankets from 8 to 30 November. **Chapra:** 500 blankets and 500 sweaters from 24 November to 29 December. **Cuttack:** 225 blankets from 11 November to 12 December. **Guirap:** 260 blankets from 11 November to 16 December. **Hatamuniguda:** 711 blankets from 30 November to 15 December. **Indore:** 600 blankets on 16 December. **Kailashahar:** 800 blankets and 1,793 sweaters from 7 July to 14 December. **Khetri:** 77 blankets on 28 October and 25 November. **Mysuru:** 600 blankets and 1,617 sweaters and sweatshirts from 15 February to 25 December. **Naora:** 721 blankets and 500 sweaters and jackets from 26 November to 11 December. **Narottam Nagar:** 500 blankets, 941 sweaters, 1,291 sweatshirts, and 1,000 pairs of socks from 18 March to 18 December. **Ootacamund:** 6,000 sweaters from 9 to 23 December. **RKMVERI, Belur:** 9 coats, 59 jackets, and 206 sweaters from 9 March 2017 to 7 March 2018. **Shillong:** 300 blankets, 550 jackets,

and 381 sweaters from 24 June to 2 December. **Shyampukur Bati:** 320 blankets from 25 November to 8 December. **Sikra-Kulingram:** 140 jackets and 100 sweaters from 20 September to 15 October. **Srinagar:** 400 blankets from 11 November to 11 December. **Taki:** 550 blankets from 7 to 28 December. **Vrindaban:** 1,700 shawls and 1,000 sweaters from 5 to 28 December. **Bangladesh: Baliati:** 340 blankets from 7 to 10 December.

**Distress Relief:** The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **Aalo:** 1,005 shirts, 1,005 trousers, 442 wallets, and 1,187 belts from 24 May to 16 December. **Antpur:** 1,000 shirts and 1,000 trousers from 30 November to 10 December. **Asansol:** 185 shirts, 100 T-shirts, and 250 trousers from 8 October to 5 November. **Kailashahar:** 500 shirts, 1,732 T-shirts, and 1,058 trousers from 7 July to 14 December. **Mysuru:** 4,002 shirts and 4,010 trousers among men, and 503 shirts and tops among women from 15 February to 12 December. **Naora:** 630 dhotis, 150 trousers, 300 saris, and 65 tarpaulins from 26 November to 11 December. **Narottam Nagar:** 750 shirts, 250 T-shirts, and 1,000 trousers among men, and 285 shirts, 730 tops, and 996 trousers among women from 26 August to 27 December. **Ootacamund:** 445 shirts, 605 T-shirts, and 2,000 trousers from 5 September to 10 October. **RKMVERI, Belur:** 290 shirts and 54 trousers among men, and 149 tops, 74 trousers, and 14 other ladies' garments among women from 9 March 2017 to 7 March 2018. **Shillong:** 856 shirts and 933 trousers among men, and 890 tops, 195 shirts, and 75 other ladies' garments among women from 24 June to 22 July. **Sikra-Kulingram:** 192 shirts and T-shirts from 20 September to 15 October. **Taki:** 3,000 shirts/T-shirts and 3,000 trousers from 7 October to 9 December. **Vrindaban:** 1,000 shirts and 1,000 trousers among men, and 1,700 saris, 1,700 pairs of socks, 1,700 phials of oil, and 3,400 bars of soap among women from 5 to 28 December. 

*“The winds of grace are  
always blowing, but you  
have to raise the sail.”*

—Sri Ramakrishna



8<sup>th</sup> March 2019

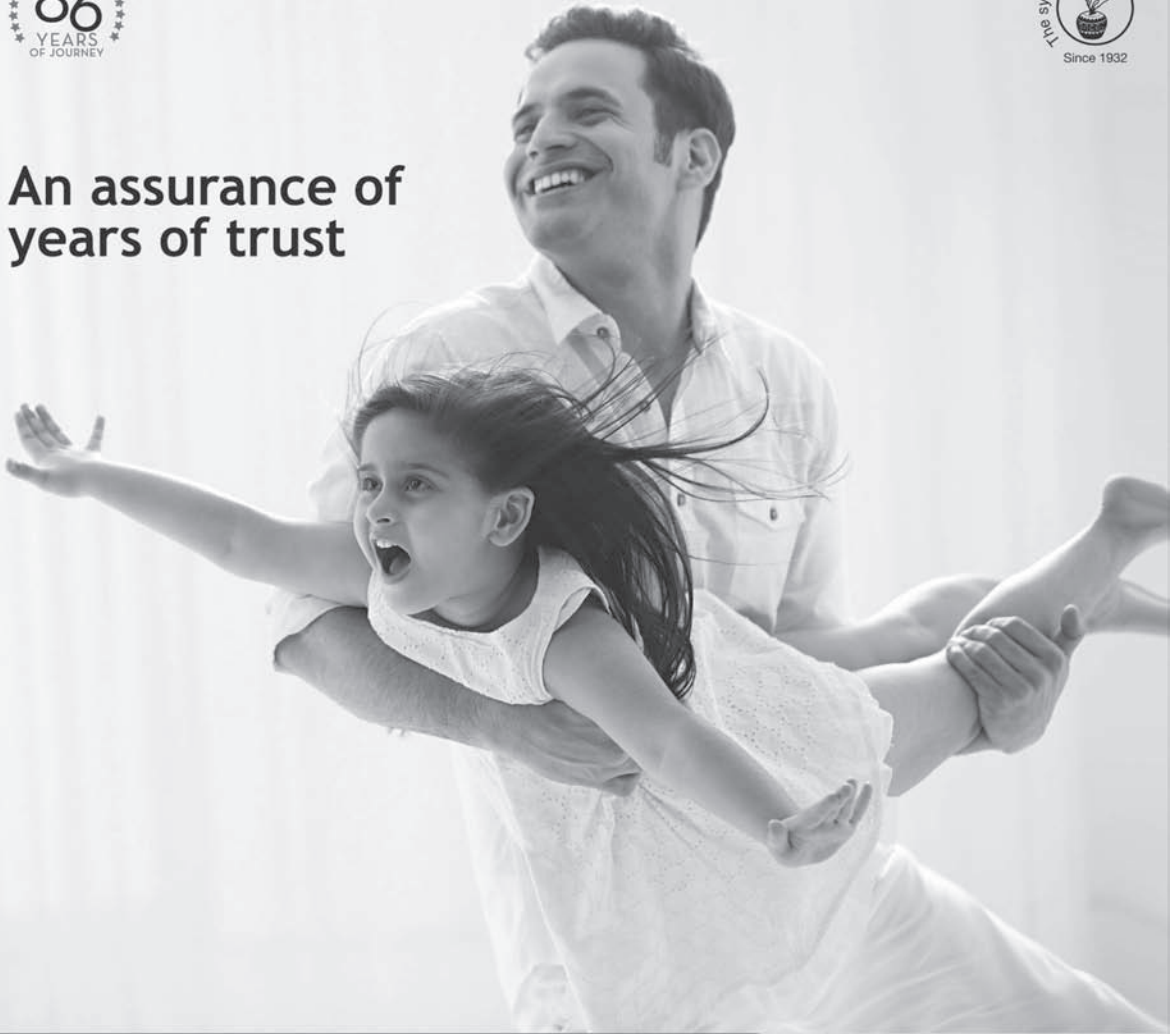
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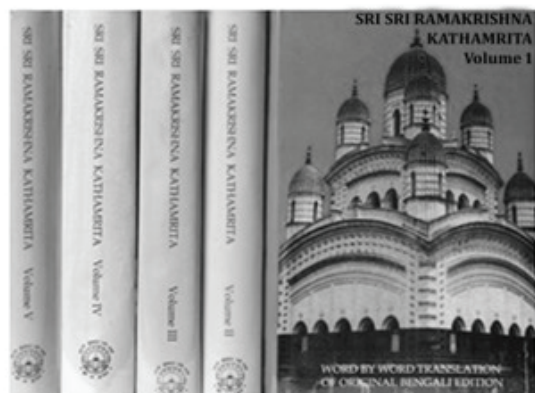
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**24th March 2019**  
**Swami Yogananda**  
**159<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary**

“Yogin Maharaj was so absorbed in meditation most of the time that his face would always look serene and luminous. Even when he would come from his bath, one would feel that he had just come out of his deep meditation.”

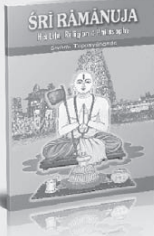
— Swami Suddhananda

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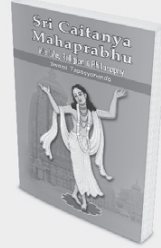


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## An Appeal

Dear Devotees,

Please accept our greetings and best wishes.

The temple at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nettayam, Thiruvananthapuram was constructed between 1916 and '24. Revered Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the spiritual son of Sri Sri Takkur and the first President of Ramakrishna Math, laid the foundation stone of this Ashrama in 1916 and Revered Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj consecrated it in 1924. Revered Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna had visited this Ashrama and got Sri Sri Takkur's vision in the shrine. The Ashrama is located on a hilltop at Nettayam in Trivandrum. This hundred year old Ashrama is an ideal place for worship, japa and meditation and an inspiration for sincere spiritual aspirants. Many senior monks of Ramakrishna Math had stayed and did tapasya here. Devotees visiting this serene, calm and holy place feel a spiritual current and often expressed it.

Due to ageing this important shrine is in a dilapidated condition and often leaks at multiple places during monsoon and as such a thorough revamping of the roof and other parts of the structure including the rubble construction is required to be done immediately to preserve it for posterity. The repair & renovation project will cover civil, electrical and structural work is estimated to cost rupees 52 lakhs. Ashrama has to mobilize this amount immediately for completing this noble work as early as possible so that the next all Kerala Sri Ramakrishna Devotees' Conference in May, 2019 can be held in the renovated Ashrama.

We earnestly request you to donate generously for this holy endeavor and be blessed by Sri Ramakrishna. Praying for the blessings of the Holy Trio,

5<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

Yours in Sri Ramakrishna,  
Swami Mokshavratanaanda,  
Adhyaksha.

Donations may be sent in favor of "Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram" in the above address or deposited in any of the following bank accounts directly with an sms to (mob)8289916882.

Savings a/c Name & No.

1. State Bank: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **30549599482**  
**IFSC:SBIN0004685** Jawaharnagar Branch
2. Syndicate Bank: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **40182200003630**  
**IFSC:SYNB0004018** Sasthamangalam Branch
3. Canara Bank: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **0821101007005**  
**IFSC:CNRB 0000821** Sasthamangalam Branch
4. FCRA a/c: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Charitable Hospital **0821101008404**  
**SWIFT Code:CNRBINBBTDC**

### Ramakrishna Ashrama

Sasthamangalam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala 695 010, India

Phone: 0471-272 2125, 272 2453, 272 6603, 272 7393 & 272 7607; Fax: 0471-231 3502

E-mail:thiruvananthapuram@rkmm.org; Website: www.ramakrishnaashramahospital.com/





## PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO THE HOLY TRIO IN KOLKATA



### Thakur Visits Pashupati Basu's House

The year is July 25, 1885. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in Balaram's drawing-room with the devotees. Narayan and certain other devotees had remarked to the Master that Nanda Bose, an aristocrat of Baghbazar, had many pictures of gods and goddesses in his house. Hence Sri Ramakrishna intended to pay a visit to Nanda's house in the afternoon. He was ready to go to Nanda Bose's house. A palanquin was brought for him, and he got into it repeating the name of God. He had put on a pair of black varnished slippers and a red-bordered cloth. As Sri Ramakrishna sat down in the palanquin, M. put the slippers by his side. He accompanied the palanquin on foot. Paresh joined them.

They entered the gate of Nanda's house, crossed the spacious square, and stopped in front of the building. The members of the family greeted the Master. He asked M. to hand him the slippers and then got out of the palanquin, went upstairs and entered into the large hall (pictured below). It was a very spacious room. Pictures of gods and goddesses

were hanging on all sides. The Master looked at the pictures of various gods and goddesses including Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, and others, and entered into ecstasy. The first picture was of Vishnu with four arms. At the very sight of it Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with ecstasy; he sat down on the floor and remained a few minutes in that spiritual mood. Seeing the pictures of the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother, he advised that they should be worshipped. Seeing Keshab's Navavidhan picture hung on the wall, "Sri Ramakrishna remarked, Yes, it contains everything. This is the ideal of modern times." After seeing the pictures, Sri Ramakrishna went to the master of the house and said: "I am very happy today. It is grand!"

As he spoke Sri Ramakrishna manifested great spiritual fervour. He was in an ecstatic mood, talking to the Divine Mother. A few minutes later he said, like a drunkard, "I am not unconscious." Looking at the house, he said: "It is a huge mansion. But what does it consist of? Bricks, timber, and clay." Indeed Thakur's words have become true. Today the palatial building stands in a dilapidated condition, located at 65/1A Bagbazar St, Bagbazar.



*Above is the room which Thakur visited. The pictures are no longer there and the room is presently in a dilapidated condition.*




*Inner courtyard of Pashupati Bati today from the first floor.*

***In memory of Dr Rina Bhar —Gopal Chandra Bhar***


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*The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it.*

—Swami Vivekananda



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Phone : 04172-244820, 651507, Tele Fax : 04172-244820  
E-mail : rao@svisslabss.net Website : www.svisslabss.net